AN AESTHETICS OF SACREDNESS: A NIETZSCHEAN READING OF JAMES JOYCE AND T. S. ELIOT

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Summary

Instead of exploring explicit textual or ideological influences of the philosophy of F. W. Nietzsche on Modernist literary writers, this thesis analyses the points at which works such as James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* bear an implicit relationship to an aesthetic theory for which the notion of *representation* (artistic or philosophical) and that of *sacredness* must be thought together. Such a theory is to be found most explicitly in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, although some of his earlier and later writings engage with it too.

Thus, from the points of convergence of the sacred and the aesthetic that appear in *The Birth of Tragedy*, I extract the keys for a theory of representation at large, of Nietzschean import, in order to contrast the notion of philosophical representation (*Vorstellung*) with the activities and discourses which philosophy has traditionally tried to avoid: rituals and myths. Out of this contrast, the conclusion emerges that there is a genealogical progression from ritual (specifically sacrifice) to myth, and from this to philosophical and artistic representation; that is to say, that only after a myth (whose root was a ritual) has lost its religious value, can philosophy and art (and literature in particular) enjoy a fully separate existence, as the secularised discourses that characterise our Modernity (here modern science is included as a development and continuation of the philosophical discourse). What makes Modernist writers play an essential role in this respect is their tacit awareness of this genealogy, which is manifested in their aesthetic practice. Two instances of this practice are analysed here, in their mythopoeic character (mainly derived from the mythic possibilities of Christianity), and their questioning of modern notions (selfhood, identity, individuality). They re-enact the original sacred speech previous to our secularised modern aesthetics.

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS IN QUOTATIONS

In quotations, the original, non-translated version of a text is supplied in footnote only when the passage belongs to F. W. Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (the only one of the three primary texts I analyse which was not originally written in English: the two others are James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*) or to passages from other works by Nietzsche which bear a significant relationship to the themes of *The Birth of Tragedy* that I discuss. I have also supplied the non-translated text of some Classical sources (in Latin and Ancient Greek) because I wanted to show some kind of awareness of the problems of interpretation that the long history of their translations has posed, due to the fact of having been assigned a privileged authoritative status.

The style guidelines I have follow have been those of the *Modern Humanities Association Style Book* (London, 1996, 5th edition), departing from them only in small matters, such as my preference for -ise instead of -ize terminations where both are possible.

0. Introduction

The link between Nietzsche's aesthetic theory and the theoretical self-understanding of Modernist literary writing is not a newly discovered one. There is the acknowledgement of explicit textual and ideological borrowings which bears witness to what I claim to be an even more pervasive influence of Nietzsche on the Modernist writers. If we recall the earthly vitalism of D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Mann's explicit references to Nietzsche´s early musical concerns, the explicitness of the link begins to be clear. But even at a less clear level, in so far as Nietzsche was one of the great critics of Modern society (emphasising that the West was living through a spiritual crisis at the time), a few decades later, when literature turns upon itself escaping from an unsatisfactory world, Nietzsche seemed to be the most appropriate reference point. The literary world of the early twentieth-century experiences in a particular manner what has repeatedly been announced as the 'disenchantment of the world': the loss of meaning and value in the outer world. There had been other thematisations of this idea, of the loss of the divine dimension of reàlity (some of Hölderlin's works are a good instance), but this acknowledgement of a spiritual void takes in Modernism a suggestive shape, which cannot fully ignore the impact of the world wars and their sequels. Modernism is not content with a retreat into the world of the self-reflexivity of signs (Symbolism and Imagism could be charged with this isolationist move), but tried to re-enchant the world from within the literary work, bestowing the lost sacredness on the outer world from what of sacred remained in the literary word. In this respect, the Modernist were the continuators of the Romantics, trying to create a new mythology that could instill sacred value into a desacralised world.

However, it is not in this respect that I will be concerned with the aesthetics of literary Modernism and Nietzsche's mingling of aesthetic and religious terms, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to focus my attention on texts that at first sight seem to be utterly remote from the Nietzschean import of Modernist concerns. Instead of, say, Lawrence or Mann, let us focus on Joyce and Eliot; and even then, not on their explicit myth-making or myth-re-enacting works, but on *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Four Quartets*. If we do so, we leave behind the terrain of identifiable textual or ideological influences; nevertheless, a different and very subtle link between Nietzsche and Modernism comes to the foreground: that which is based on a different notion of the articulation of the sacred and the aesthetic: no longer to intentionally create, re-create or re-live a mythology, as the Romantics tried, but to install the literary word in those interstices where mythology is still alive, and where the sacred and the aesthetic are indissolubly tied. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Four Quartets* move at various levels of mythic resonance, but one central to both is that in which Christianity appears indissociable from aesthetic production and enjoyment, not because of its being a particular creed, but by its being one of the most important shaping forces of our Western history. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Four Quartets* certainly do not incorporate the kind of disdain for Christianity that we find in the later Nietzsche, but pay heed instead to those points of the Christian experience where sacredness becomes one with art. I want to argue that Nietzsche was already aware of these points of intersection in his early writings, specially in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and even more, that a certain continuity in this respect can be traced through his later production, in so far as his thought can be seen as an aesthetic turn in the history of philosophy.

These privileged meeting points are myth and ritual, and it is in relation to them, specially myth, that philosophical discourse has tried to define its own limits. Let us see what happens when the philosophical discourse of aesthetic theory has to encounter the truth of myth, ritual and sacrifice. Let us see what happens when Nietzsche tries to unfold an aesthetic theory in *The Birth of Tragedy* without renouncing the implications of the question of sacredness in ancient Greek religion: could this be an analogous challenge to that which Joyce and Eliot face when they engage in an aesthetic practice without renouncing the implications of the experience of Christianity for Modernity?

To see whether there is such an analogy, I will extract out of Nietzsche's aesthetic theory a more general theory of representation, in order to see what the relationship is between the objectivity of *philosophical* representation (*Vorstellung*) arising out of an aesthetic context, and the points of intersection of sacredness and the aesthetic (ritual and myth, in this order). But even if a relationship is elicited, how can the Modernists surpass the secularised character of literature, and how can they illuminate the genesis of a philosophical notion (representation) that art continues to question at the end of our Modernity?

1. The Sacred and the Aesthetic in *The Birth of Tragedy*

The Birth of Tragedy is Nietzsche's first published work, and it is also the work in which he comes closest to the systematic exposition of an aesthetic theory. Here we find primarily an enquiry into the nature of aesthetic experience and creation, viewed in their relation to an alleged origin in Greek classical antiquity. Ancient Greece as an original moment is within the book more than just a historical beginning, in its providing the very terms in which historical development is going to unfold. Reference to this past is a recurrent motif in our Western self-understanding, including our thinking about art; what makes Nietzsche's use of this motif relevant here is the fact that he establishes an internal connection between the art of the ancient Greeks and their religion. The implications of this link are going to define Nietzsche's approach to classical antiquity throughout his works (up to the point of identifying himself with a Greek deity), but they will also be extended to his evaluations of modern culture.

Artistic experience is for Nietzsche to be regarded as the all-encompassing mode of existence of the ancient Greeks: they are to be seen first and foremost as taking delight in the playfulness of beautiful illusions; yet, this is only possible as part of a dynamic in which religious experience plays an equally important role. The emphasis is not so much on institutionalised religion, as on the irreducible forces to which those religious institutions

respond; what matters for Nietzsche is not Pagan doctrine, but the Greeks' confrontation with a whole domain of reality out of which their religion arises: the realm of the sacred. It is in relation to the experience of certain aspects of reality, singled out as sacred, that a reflection on the nature of art is unfolded within *The Birth of Tragedy*.

1.1. An Aesthetic Metaphysics

The theory that Nietzsche presents in *The Birth of Tragedy* is framed by two concerns that are to a certain extent peripheral in relation to the development of the central ideas of the book: on the one hand, there is the philological task of giving an account of the origins and historical significance of ancient Greek tragedy; on the other, there is Nietzsche's purpose to justify an accentuated admiration for Richard Wagner and his music, this seen precisely as a rebirth of the ancient tragic spirit. The legitimacy of these preoccupations, or indeed the degree of success in shaping them into tenable expositions, does not affect the validity of the theoretical insights about the aesthetic that the text provides: whether Nietzsche has a place in philological orthodoxy, or Wagner is regarded as a musical genius, is only accidental for the present engagement with the theory of *The Birth of Tragedy*. The legitimacy of such an engagement becomes clear if, following Nietzsche's own remarks in his 1886 critical foreword to the book, we regard *The Birth of Tragedy* as an integral part of Nietzsche's consistent philosophical development, as well as a work that prefigures this

development. Rather than emphasising the Wagnerian tribute, for example, we would like to say, with Sarah Kofman, that

> the time of a re-reading that tries to make *The Birth of Tragedy* to be born again detaching it as much as possible from Wagner (and thus from Schopenhauerian pessimism) emphasises the aspect of triumphal overcoming, and conceals the illness under its remedy.[4]

That is to say, such a reading emphasises the continuity of *The Birth of Tragedy* with Nietzsche's later works, in which the positive aspect of life-affirmation is more clearly present, and not just as a 'remedy' for or counterpart to an essentially negative existence.

However, it must be acknowledged that *The Birth of Tragedy* is produced not only in the context of philological concerns and personal admiration, but also under the spell of a philosophical tradition that Nietzsche was later to repudiate openly: the metaphysical tradition that includes both Kant and Schopenhauer as its heirs. References to these two thinkers are always positive throughout the book:

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[4] Sarah Kofman, *Explosion II: Les enfants de Nietzsche* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), p.87. My translation.

> through Kant and Schopenhauer the spirit *of German philosophy* [...] introduced an infinitely more profound and serious consideration of ethical questions and art.[5]

Thus the degree of tribute to Kant and Schopenhauer can be seen as an index of the dependence of *The Birth of Tragedy* on a tradition from which Nietzsche was later to depart. This would also explain why the book is considered, even by Nietzsche himself, as the exposition of an *artistic metaphysics*. We would find here the old metaphysical themes, only reworked in the context of art: the separation of reality from immediacy, the unreliable nature of the world of phenomena, the positing of a transcendent realm of value. Nevertheless, what we find in fact is a *displacement* of metaphysics through art: the traditional notions of metaphysics are employed, and some even endorsed, but only to be rendered mobile in a context dominated by the tension between sacred and aesthetic experience. We could say of the Nietzschean position that it has

> the painful character of a process that consists then in expressing, with Kantian and Schopenhauerian formulations, unheard-of and new

[5] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. S. Whiteside (London: Penguin, 1993), §19, p. 95. ['*Der deutschen Philosophie*, durch Kant und Schopenhauer [...] eine unendlich tiefere und ernstere Betrachtung der ethischen Fragen und der Kunst eingeleitet wurde'. *Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (henceforth KGW) ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, vol. III.1 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyer, 1972), p. 124.]

> valuations, which are radically opposed to the spirit as well as to the taste of Kant and Schopenhauer.[6]

The Birth of Tragedy can thus be seen as a particular locus of displacement, and not simply as a continuation of a decadent tradition in the form of a young philosopher's 'artistic metaphysics' or 'metaphysics of illusion'. The old concepts are put to the service of a new structure, so that the interaction between reality and illusion, in its being part of an artistic game, can no longer be easily reconciled with a structure of transcendence.

However, even if the new valuations, with their positive emphasis on playfulness, are opposed to the spirit and taste of Kant and Schopenhauer, and even if the world of illusion (as opposed to the true, metaphysical one) is granted the dignity of art, the emphasis on dualisms persists, suggesting that the irreconcilability of dual structures is in fact a clear echo of the metaphysical tradition to which Kant and Schopenhauer belong, with its inability to think immanence, and thus with its having to resort to a fundamental duality (or to duality as foundational).

The most prominent of the dualisms pervading *The Birth of Tragedy* is that having the Apolline and the Dionysiac as its poles: they are the two primary artistic forces at work in ancient Greek tragedy, but their interaction is also at

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[6] Kofman, *Explosion II.* p. 88. My translation.

the root of the unfolding of reality as an aesthetic product. Yet here we can already see that the structure of this dualism does not simply correspond to the positing of an irreconcilable transcendence, and in this sense a fundamental distance is introduced with respect to the previous 'metaphysics of illusion', the long tradition of thought for which immediate reality is essentially illusory and therefore not to be trusted. For Nietzsche, the 'illusory' is not primarily the world of deception, but the world of art: thus through an intimation of the aesthetic forces at work in artistic production we can see the illusory under the light of the real, since the forces that make reality 'appear' as art are the same ones that allow us to be creators of art works.

Already in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche manifests a preference for one of these two forces: the Dionysiac, associated with the impulse behind the non-visual arts, particularly music, and in contrast with the Apolline, which is the impulse behind the visual arts. The notion of the Dionysiac is the closest that we can get to the idea of a pure reality, 'in-itself'. However, as we shall see, the fact that the Dionysiac cannot be thought of outside the aesthetic process, the fact that it is already an aesthetic force, precludes an analogy with a traditional metaphysical structure. It is important to note that the notion of the Dionysiac is going to be a recurrent motif in Nietzsche's works, and that it is not difficult to trace a continuity between the aesthetic, creative nature that the Dionysiac is assigned in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the traits of joyfulness and life-affirmation that acquire more prominence in later writings; in *The Birth of*

Tragedy the Dionysiac is already a source of value and a founding force, and not a rigid entity within a metaphysical schema.

Through the religious figures of Apollo and Dionysus, Nietzsche's 'aesthetic metaphysics' intertwines the manifestation of reality as art with access to ultimate reality as sacred. The two impulses that give rise to artistic reality are for Nietzsche those which the ancient Greeks conceptualised as the gods Apollo and Dionysus, and the cults and rituals associated with them are continuous, respectively, with the two kinds of artistic activity: visual and non-visual. Thus the use of ancient religious motifs is not just symbolic, but intended to convey essentially the same interrelation between the sacred and the aesthetic that Nietzsche perceived to occur in ancient Greece.[7]

The Apolline impulse can be defined as the tendency towards the clarity of forms and the definition of boundaries, and finds a parallel in the psychological dreaming state, where the visual overtakes all other elements. The Dionysiac can be defined as the tendency towards an original unitary yet dynamic state, and finds its correlate in the state of intoxication. Both are divine tendencies, and both define the limits of Nietzsche's understanding of ancient Greek religion. The serenity, clarity and radiance of Apollo applies to all the majesty of the Olympus, resulting in an art of visual pleasure, whereas the

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[7] For a different perception of Nietzsche's use of these religious motifs, which is not literal but 'paraliteral' in the authors' terminology, see J. P. Stern and M. S. Silk, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

conflicting and frenzied nature of Dionysus, expressed in the loss of boundaries in music, constitutes the other side of the opposition, and threatens the order of the Olympus. The Dionysiac is felt to be foreign to the nature of the ancient sacred cults of Greece, and yet Nietzsche insists that it is the expression of a primordial reality, allowing us to have *direct* access to the sacred primal unity of the real in a way analogous to the direct access to the essence of the original dynamicity that for Schopenhauer musical experience provides.

This sacred primal unity, this 'primordial oneness', is what can only be properly called 'real': it is for Nietzsche the world in-itself that Schopenhauer characterised as blind will. Nietzsche also sees this primal reality as will and dynamicity, and thus subscribes to some fundamental traits of the Schopenhauerian metaphysics of illusion: the world of phenomena is the illusory manifestation of the universal will. However, Nietzsche escapes the pessimism inherent in this view by an appeal to the positive value of the aesthetic that is even more radical than that of Schopenhauer: the world of phenomena itself unfolds according to the mechanisms of art, according to the Apolline delight in illusory boundaries, and therefore it shows an essential kinship with the other side of the aesthetic spectrum, with the Dionysiac expression of the world will. Although there is still a hierarchy that sees in the Dionysiac a more direct expression of the will, the generalisation of the interplay between the sacred and the aesthetic to the whole of reality both assigns a new role to art and restitutes the dignity of the illusory: art is the only justification of manifest reality, but at the same time the totality of this illusory

reality can benefit from enjoying an artistic link to the origin. Art is not only, as for Schopenhauer, a metaphysical consolation, given that we cannot attain the truly real through the phenomenal world of everyday life; art is also that pattern on which we can base our understanding of reality, because reality unfolds as art, according to aesthetic mechanisms, from the sacredness of the original oneness to the polychrome variety of phenomena:

> [...] this above all must be plain to us, to our humiliation *and* our enhancement, that the whole comedy of art is not at all performed for us, for our improvement or edification any more than we are the actual creators of that art world: but we can assume for our own part that we are images and artistic projections for the true creator of that world, and that our highest dignity lies in the meaning of works of art — for it is only as *an aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified.*[8]

The justification of the real can only be attained through the categories of aesthetics, not because the aesthetic is regarded as a privileged reality, but

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[8] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §5, p.32. ['Denn dies muss uns vor allem, zu unserer Erniedrigung *und* Erhönung, deutlich sein, dass die ganze Kunstkomödie durchaus nicht für uns, etwa unsrer Besserung und Bildung wegen, aufgefürt wird, ja dass wir ebensowenig die eigentlichen Schöpfer jener Kunswelt sind: wohl aber dürfen wir von uns selbst annehmen, dass wir für den wahren für den wahren Schöpfer derselben shon Bilder und Künstleriche Projectionen sind und in der Bedeutung von Kunstwerken unsre höchste Würde haben — denn nur als *aesthetisches Phänomen* ist das Dasein und die Welt ewig *gerechtfertig*'. KGW, III.1. p. 43.]

because reality in its entirety becomes intelligible only when viewed aesthetically. In this sense *The Birth of Tragedy* provides a standpoint from which the sacred (as the ultimate reality) and the aesthetic cannot be thought separately, since it is precisely as an aesthetic phenomenon that sacredness expresses itself to create the world of appearances, providing for this world of appearances a justification which, partaking of the contingent character of the aesthetic process, is the only possible one, and constitutes for Nietzsche a solid ground for the affirmation of existence precisely *because* of its contingency. This could be seen as a variant of the Christian creationist model, but the differences are important: although the notion of the original 'will' which objectifies itself is modelled on the notion of the personal human will, it is not the free choice of a personal god that creates the world, but the impersonal artistic force which is continuous with the individual will of the creative artist.

Drawing from the impersonal dimension of artistic creation, beyond their authors' reach, Nietzsche entertains a notion of 'will' that is nevertheless not wholly dissociable from its actualisation in individual artistic creation: reality can only be justified as art, and the artistic process of the objectification of the universal will is *the same* as the creative process of the individual artist. Art does not only provide a model among others according to which we can understand reality: reality is only intelligible according to aesthetic parameters, and the activity of the artist is a participation in this ontologically prior artistic process; under this view, it makes sense that Nietzsche would call art the 'true metaphysical activity', since it is the activity through which we can understand the objectification of a sacred ground into the reality of appearances: thus it

puts us in touch with that which is not reducible to the physicality of the everyday world of illusion. Yet it is not a metaphysical activity in the traditional sense, since the duality which it presupposes (the artistic will vs. its objectification) already belongs to the objectified, immanent world of appearances: the will of the artist is not a symbol or an analogue of the will that creates the world, but a participation in this will itself; reality as appearance and the artistic product have the same ontological status, and are not just each other's analogue.

We can take Nietzsche's use of traditional terminology for the description of a displacing new structure as the possibility of reading back the history of metaphysical thought from this new perspective: not as the history of a fundamental error, but as the history of the attempts to achieve a self-grounding status for (illusory) theoretical activity; once the grounding is shown to fall outside the limits of theory, those attempts are legitimised, and their vocabulary can be used. This is so because the inadequacy of these vocabularies is constitutive of the illusory character of theory, now understood as part of the artistic unfolding of reality: just as the Apolline world of defined images is illusory in relation to the Dionysiac intimation of the primordial and unitary state of natural flux, the world of theory is illusory in relation to the original dynamicity that it tries to capture, and this is its constitutive nature, as theory. But a fundamental displacement in relation to previous understandings of the tradition takes place, since with Nietzsche's 'artistic metaphysics' an essential contiguity is revealed between the ever-changing world of *physis* and that of its

'transcendence': they are immanently related as the artistic will is to the artistic product. The dynamicity of *physis*, the artistic will, is itself the source of the metaphysical discourse, which does not transcend *physis*, but rather relates to it in a contingent manner within the structure of artistic creation. Thus the transformation of traditional metaphysics into an artistic one in *The Birth of Tragedy* is not simply a variation in terminology, but a significant turn that proves the term 'artistic metaphysics' to be something of an oxymoron.

Art is not to occupy the place of metaphysics, but rather, metaphysics is to be shown to respond to the same mechanisms as art-production. Thus, if the justification of the real can only be made through the categories of aesthetics it is not because the aesthetic is regarded as a privileged reality, but, to say it again, because reality in its entirety becomes intelligible only when viewed aesthetically. In this sense, Nietzsche surpasses aestheticism in *The Birth of Tragedy* by, instead of conceiving of art as a substitute or remedy for life (as Schopenhauer and *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism would have it), producing a theory that rests on the indissociability of the two, and ultimately on the affirmation of life understood through art. For this reason, Nietzsche provides an adequate conceptual framework for the aesthetic ideas underlying much of literary Modernism, in contrast to earlier articulations of life and art, to which his theory was contemporary.[9]

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[9] See Michael Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth: Belief and Responsibility in Twentieth Century Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 27-28.

This pervasiveness of the aesthetic structure threatens the basis of traditional conceptions and delimitations, yet assumes a strange continuity with this tradition; while endorsing the old view of art as imitation, Nietzsche enlarges this view so that it becomes almost self-contradictory:

> art is not only an imitation of the truth of nature, but a metaphysical supplement to that truth of nature, coexisting with it in order to overcome it.[10]

This implies that nature already has the quality of the aesthetic, but it incorporates human artefacts as an excess that is neither strictly alien nor fully assimilated; human artistic life provides a metaphysical supplement because it reproduces, within the artistic unfolding of reality that reality itself carries out, the artistic mechanisms that constitute it. The concept of imitation shows now the consistency of its place within the system: it can only prove meaningful not with reference to a process of traditional *mimesis*, but as an organic reproduction within the sphere that contains both imitation and imitator: the aesthetic manifestation of reality (by reality itself) in the form of illusion. To understand this particular notion of imitation it helps to bring to mind the notions of 'excess' and 'overfullness' that will play an important role in Nietzsche's later writings: we must be able to conceive, against the standard

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[10] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §24, p. 114. ['Die Kunst nicht nur Nachahmung der Naturwirklichkeit, sondern gerade ein metaphysisches Supplement der Naturwirklichkeit ist, zu deren Ueberwindung neben sie gestellt'. KGW, III.1, p. 147.]

logic of representation, of entities that are *more* than what they are, without for that reason ceasing to be themselves; the excess of reality allows for a dynamic process that is not external but constitutive, yet in its dynamicity continuously threatening the stability of a basis. In terms of representation, since the dynamic of the real is that of artistic production, in this picture the represented and representing elements are not external to each other, but part of a continuity that nevertheless involves differences (because of its being a structure of representation). To this view of the world, which wants to reconcile imitation with participation, corresponds the pre-modern view of the universe as a *cosmos* infinitely reproduced within a multiplicity of *microcosmoi* which are also *part* of a the general totality, the organisational principle being immanent and yet transposable from one level to another.[11]

Therefore, the concept of imitation in *The Birth of Tragedy* is certainly of a kind, and not synonymous with Aristotelian *mimesis*. According to Nietzsche's concept of the imitative nature of art, the Apolline and the Dionysiac (the primary artistic impulses)

> spring from nature itself, *without the mediation of the human artist*', and in them 'nature's artistic urges are immediately and directly

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[11] To this view also corresponds *metonymic* as opposed to *metaphoric* representation, as will be discussed in chapter 2.

> satisfied [...]. Faced with these immediate artistic states in nature, every artist is an "imitator"".[12]

Thus human creations *participate through imitation* in the Apolline tendency towards delight in the beauty of form, through the principle of individuation that assigns clear illusory boundaries to them; or else they incorporate the Dionysiac sense of intoxication at having glimpsed into the unity of reality after the fragmentation of the illusory world of individuals. These opposed (and, as I shall show, complementary) forces are the basic concepts upon which Nietzsche builds his theory of the aesthetic in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and as their belonging to an immanent structure of imitation has shown, their status bears some complexity: they are not simply aesthetic forces, because, strictly speaking, the aesthetic is what results from their interplay; they stand outside manifest reality in so far as reality and its illusory appearance are their products; they are not only instrumental metaphors, because they are prior to the metaphorical character of all expression; finally, they are not only categories tied to a historical period, because their ascription to the historical development of ancient Greece is made under the assumption of an essential continuity between this past and our modernity, and it is precisely by emphasising the actual

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[12] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §2, p. 18. ['Aus der Natur selbst, *ohne Vermittelung des menschlichen Künstlers*, hervobrechen, und in denen sich ihre Kunsttriebe zunächst und auf directem Wege befriedigen [...]. Diesen unmittelbaren Kunstzuständen der Natur gegenüber ist jeder Kunstler "Nachamer"'. KGW, III.1, p. 26.]

historical conditions of their occurrence in the past that we can gain an understanding of their operativeness in our modernity.

From this theoretical standpoint, Nietzsche analyses the stages of ancient Greek culture not as concepts but as the historical realities prior to the formation of historical concepts, though in strict vinculation with them as their condition. The pre-Olympian world of the Greeks corresponds to the times when nature manifested what was seen as her terrible Titanic powers, and thus this world constitutes the early stage of the realisation of the Hellenic will. Out of the unbearable wisdom provided by this stage, and in correlation with its powerful insight into reality (a reality perceived as an awesome abyss), the world of Olympian religion appears then as the necessary counterpart, as the transfiguring mirror of beauty. This is how, for Nietzsche, classic Greek religion responds to the same impulse as plastic and epic art; thus it would be explained how the poetry of Homer manages to stand in inseparable relation to both the world of myth and the clarity of forms that characterises classic visual art. If, in Homer, religious myth and artistic poetry cannot be detached from each other, it is because they spring from the same Apolline force that turns the horror of the Dionysiac vision into the blissful delight in the perfection of form.

However, the Dionysiac longing for the original and awe-inspiring unity of natural powers (these perceived as the contradictory joining of limitless destruction and limitless creation in Nature) was not completely ruled out from the beautiful illusory world of Olympian religion and its individuating

boundaries: it persisted first in the form of ancient and barbaric cults, and later it progressively found a space within the Greek spirit itself. At this stage in ancient Greek culture

> the individual, with all its restraints and moderations, was submerged in the self-oblivion of the Dionysiac state and forgot the Apolline dictates. *Excess* was revealed as truth, contradiction; the bliss born of pain spoke from the heart of nature.[13]

It was at this point that tragedy emerged, blending the Apolline and the Dionysiac in a single artistic form. By rejoicing in the epic nature of the heroic world portrayed on the stage, Attic tragedy has an Apolline dimension, since the epic is characterised by the clear boundaries and the plasticity of the narrative, dreaming state. On the other hand, by negating this world and opposing it through the musical intervention of the chorus, Attic tragedy incorporated the Dionysiac insight into the mysteries of reality, since the dynamicity of music is the parallel to the dynamicity of ultimate reality, which is in an eternal agonic state. Through the mediation of its musical elements, tragedy presented the illusory *as* illusory; the heroic world of the stage, of the same nature as the phenomenal world, was no longer a substitute concealing a deeper reality, as in

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[13] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §4, p. 27. ['Das Individuum, mit allen seinen Grenzen und Maasen. ging hier in der Selbstvergessenheit der dionysischen Zustände unter und vergass die apollinischen Satzungen. Das *Uebermaass* enthüllte sich als Wahrheit, der Widerspruch, die aus Schmerzen geborene Wonne sprach von sich aus dem Herzen der Natur heraus'. KGW, III.1, p. 37.]

the Homeric epic, but an illusion rendered as such by the presence of the music of the chorus, the chorus being what was truly responsible for the fall of the hero. Music, as for Schopenhauer, constitutes for the early Nietzsche a direct idea of the world-in-itself, of the universal will, and thus lies at the heart of Dionysiac experience. Nietzsche finds an essential kinship between musical experience and the Dionysiac rites which filled the initiates with the intoxicating experience of the dismemberment of their individual selves; thus it is only proper that the collapse of the individuality of the tragic hero takes place through the intervention of the chorus: the *hybris* of the hero is punished by the forces of de-individuation, just as the phenomenal world constantly reverts to the primordial reality of the universal will; the dynamic of Greek tragedy is also the dynamic of reality, accounted for in a discourse that is only 'metaphysic' in the sense that art is metaphysic, that is, in its essential relation to the original *physis*, to the original reality.

1.2. The Mutual Requirement of the Apolline and the Dionysiac

The joining together of the two artistic forces in Greek tragedy is only one instance of the relationship between the Apolline and the Dionysiac, which adopts different modes according to different art forms. Music, as the art closest to sacred dynamic unity, and painting, as the paradigmatic visual art, would stand at the ends of a spectrum; nevertheless, the terms of interaction that

Nietzsche provides for the two artistic impulses in *The Birth of Tragedy* allow for a more complex characterisation, so that the notions of individuation vs. formlessness and contemplation vs. involvement cannot simply be aligned with the two poles which the two divine forces are.

There appears to be a contradiction when Nietzsche subscribes to the Kantian and Schopenhauerian notion of contemplation as the true artistic state, while at the same time he places the highest artistic value in the closeness to the Dionysiac attuning with the universal will; according to this idea music is for Nietzsche the most 'objective' art. If the artistic is essentially will-less, detached from desire, how is the Dionysiac to count as a reference for the valuation of art? And if we take the example of lyric poetry, whose artistic status Nietzsche does not deny, how can the clearest expression of individual will and subjective longing be granted artistic value? Where is the Dionysiac, the objective, the universal, in lyric poetry? The answer to these questions requires a deeper understanding of the Nietzschean notion of 'universal will', a notion that at this stage can be seen as already prefiguring his later concept of the 'will to power' in so far as it stands for reality's excess with respect to itself: the only truly real is the tendency toward the increase of force, and this tendency is not to be found in any substratum, but it is to be taken as the non-substantiated constitution of primordial reality; excess and overflow are not a characteristic of the original reality, but original reality itself, essentially contradictory because its essence is

pure becoming (and only in a metaphorical sense can we say that 'becoming' is 'essence')

Nietzsche's concept of will presupposes both a naturalisation of the human and a humanisation of nature: under this view the world-in-itself is characterised as longing and desire, as an essentially dynamic force, but retaining its objective character, its traits of universality and anonymity, as opposed to a *personal* will. To make sense of the idea of a universal will we must be able to conceive of a dynamism that cannot be encapsulated in subjectivity, and yet retains the characteristics of personal longing; it is for this reason that such an idea does not respond to our modern, secularised mechanistic view of the dynamic of natural processes. On the contrary, this primary dynamism of the will is first expressed in the exuberantly powerful expressions of Nature, whose cyclical generations also point to the Nietzschean conception of the eternal return; this is a generative power that the Greeks recall among others in the figure of the satyr, 'a symbol of nature's sexual omnipotence, which the Greeks were accustomed to considering with respectful astonishment.'[14] Behind nature's sexual power, behind the ever-generating force of the natural world, the universal will stands as the non-differentiated realm of ultimate reality, into which only Dionysiac intoxication can glimpse. Since this realm is conceptually previous to any individuation and to any characterisation

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[14] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §8, p. 40. ['Sinnbild der geschlechtlichen Allgewalt der Natur, die der Grieche gewöhnt ist mit ehrfürchtigem Staunen zu betrachen.' KGW, III.1, p. 54.]

of the human subject, it is the space *prior to* subjectivity, *prior to* the conception of the will as subjective desire. The will as subjective desire appears thus as a derived concept, fully understandable only in relation to the larger notion of an objective, world will. It is in this sense that Nietzsche's claim about the contemplative nature of pure art is compatible with its dependence on a relationship with the universal will, for the individual subject has precisely to abandon his subjective will in order to embrace the mystical state of the dissolution of his own self into the undifferentiated flow of the primal unity. Therefore, art is will-less only because it involves a distancing from the *subjective* will, parallel to the embracing of the *universal* will: it is not will-less because it is static, but because it is attuned with a will which is not subjective. Without bearing this distinction in mind, Nietzsche's use of the terms is misleading, and leads to important incongruities.[15]

Still the question about lyric poetry remains: how can the exacerbation of subjectivity be a truly artistic form? Precisely by presenting subjectivity in the only way in which it can appear: as an illusion. The lyric poet succeeds in communicating the sacred experience of his own dissolution in so far as he uses the illusion of his individual self to let the eternal reality of the world will speak:

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[15] One of these incongruities is pointed out in Michael Tanner's edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 120, note 16.

> the artist has already abandoned his subjectivity in the Dionysiac process [...]. The 'I' of the lyric poet therefore sounds from the very depths of being: his 'subjectivity' in the sense used by modern aestheticians is a falsehood.[16]

The Apolline delight in illusory individuation takes here the form of the mediation of the poet's subjectivity, just as within tragedy it took that of the individuality of the epic hero: the self of lyric poetry

> is not that of the waking, empirically real man [...], but rather the sole, truly existing and eternal self that dwells at the basis of being, through whose depictions the lyric genius sees right through the very basis of being.[17]

The lyric genius understands then, as well as the tragic one, the relationships of mutual requirement in which the Apolline and the Dionysiac stand within true art, for in both art forms the universality of the Dionysiac force is expressed

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[16] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §5, p. 29. ['Seine Subjectivität hat der Künstler bereits in dem dionysischen Prozess aufgegeben [...]. Das "Ich" des Lyrikers tönt also aus dem Abgrunde des Seins: seine "Subjecktivität" im Sinne der neueren Aesthetiker is eine Einbildung.' KGW, III.1, p. 40.]

[17] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §5, p. 30. ['Nur ist diese Ichheit nicht dieselbe, wie die des wachen, empirisch-realen Menschen, sondern die einzige überhaupt wahrhaft seiende und ewige, im Grunde der Dinge ruhende Ichheit, durch deren Abbildern der Lyrische Genius bus auf jenen Grund der Dinge hindurchsieht.' KGW, III.1, p. 41.]

through mechanisms of individuation, of which the epic hero and the subjective poet are clear indexes. But even the musical dimension inherent in lyric poetry stands in close association with the individual images which are its counterpart, for, even though music 'does not *require* images or concepts',[18] it must find expression in accordance with certain criteria of form, and thus in the context of lyric poetry the linguistic form acts as 'the mirror of imagery and concepts'[19] thanks to which the universal will appears *as* music; it is then an inevitable tendency of the Dionysiac that it must seek expression in the Apolline:

> in the phenomenon of the lyric poet [...] music strives to make its essence known in Apolline images: bearing in mind that music, at its highest level, must also seek to attain its highest expression in images, we must consider it possible that it can also find the symbolic expression of its actual Dionysiac wisdom.[20]

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[18] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §6, p. 35. ['Das Bild und den Begriff nicht *braucht*'. KGW, III.1, p. 47.]

[19] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §6, p. 34. ['Spiegel der Bildlichkeit und der Begriffe'. KGW, III.1, p. 46.]

[20] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §16, p. 79. ['An dem Phänomen des Lyrikers [...] die Musik im Lyriker darnach ringt, in apollinischen Bildern über ihr Wesen sich kund zu geben: denken wir uns jetzt dass die Musik in ihrer höchsten Steigerung auch zu einer höchsten Verbildlichung zu kommen suchen muss, so müssen wir für möglich halten dass sie auch den symbolischen Ausdruck für ihre eigentliche dionysische Weisheit zu finden wisse.' KGW, III.1, p. 103-104.]

While such an expression is for Nietzsche to be found perfectly accomplished in the balance of ancient Greek tragedy, where the complementary relationship between the Apolline and the Dionysiac is shown in the most explicit manner, nevertheless this relationship is present, if implicitly, in any form of art: even in the redemption through images of the visual arts and in the inevitable formal restrictions of the most Dionysiac music. But it is only by virtue of its dependence on the Dionysiac impulse that art acquires aesthetic value: it is thus in the case of tragedy, whose acknowledgement of illusions as such is made explicit by the negative character of its content; thus also in lyric poetry, where the intensification of subjectivity can be easily traced back to an insight into its illusory character; thus, finally, in Homeric epic and Olympian religion, in so far as, this time implicitly, they are the necessary healing counterpart to the original pain and suffering of a purely dynamic existence. The Dionysiac enjoys then for Nietzsche a foundational character, and this is corroborated by its privileged degree of closeness to reality 'in-itself', or in less traditional terms, to 'becoming' viewed independently of its representational actualisations; this is the sacred flux out of which aesthetic representations arise.

Yet in so far as Apollo is also a deity, the metaphors not being innocent, if metaphors at all, the Apolline still keeps a relationship with the sacred, not only by being a counterpart, but by virtue of an essential character which is reflected in the unquestionable divine rights of Apollo within the Greek pantheon. The Apolline's essential relationship with the sacred is manifested in

the fact that the Apolline cannot be conceived of outside the structure of unfolding which has the Dionysiac as its first moment, requiring its illusory actualisation:

> the truly existent, the primal Oneness, eternally suffering and contradictory, also needs the delightful vision, the pleasurable illusion for its constant redemption[21].

The evaluative terms with which this mutual requirement is characterised here betray Nietzsche's youthful attachment to Schopenhauer and his pessimistic outlook, which Nietzsche was later to see as typically Christian. For the later Nietzsche the primal and contradictory world of becoming will not necessarily be loaded with a negative character, and its need of illusory representations will certainly not be understood in redemptive terms, but as the inevitable and joyful discharge of overfullness. However, it is the relation of mutual requirement that must be emphasised here, and the one that will find a traceable continuity in later theories.[22] At this point, the terms of the co-implication are expressed by

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[21] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §4, p. 25. ['Das Wahrhaft-Seiende und Ur-Eine, als das ewig Leidende und Wiederspruchswolle, zugleich die entzückende Vision, den lustvollen Schein, zu seiner steten Erlösung braucht.' KGW, III.1, p. 34.]

[22] This dynamic of opposition, in which two contrary forces are also complementary, may bring to mind the structure of Hegelian dialectics: it is, however, essentially different from this structure, in its primarily *agonistic* character, without sublation. Thus, if it is to find a precedent, the Heraclitean understanding of struggle is a better instance than Hegel's. See in

saying that, if the demon Silenus, Dionysus's companion, also participates in the god's insight into the unbearableness of reality, then

> in the highest artistic symbolism, we behold that Apolline world of beauty and its substratum, the terrible wisdom of Silenus, and we intuitively understand their reciprocal necessity.[23]

Aided by these statements, we can now approach the elements of Nietzsche's aesthetic metaphysics and set them in motion. Using the traditional structure of reflection, Nietzsche compares the gap between dreaming and waking life to that between the Apolline and the Dionysiac: just as our ordinary waking life is a first degree of illusion and our dreaming is a second, Apolline images and reflections are two stages removed from the reality of the universal will, of which music, as the Dionysiac art, is a direct copy. But, having agreed on the reciprocal requirement of the Apolline and the Dionysiac, this static system of reflection (that owes so much to the traditional metaphysics of light and its dualism of reality and appearances) can be turned into a dynamic tension in which the status of the mirror is highly problematic. Whereas in the previous

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this respect the article by Sarah Kofman, 'Nietzsche and the Obscurity of Heraclitus', trans. by F. Lionnet-McCumber, *Diacritics*, 17/3 (Fall 1987), 39-55.

[23] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §4, p. 25. ['[...] Haben wir, in höchster Kunstsymbolik, jene apollinische Schönheitswelt und ihren Untergrund, die schreckliche Weisheit des Silen, vor unseren Blicken und begreifen, durch Intuition, ihre gegenseitige Nothwendigkeit.' KGW, III.1, p. 35.]

structure of reflection (will-Dionysiac-Apolline) the mirror has no extension, in other contexts the mirror has an active role: Nietzsche tells us of how the 'Hellenic "will" held up a transfiguring mirror to itself',[24] this mirror being the Apolline structure of images and concepts that makes music *appear*, within lyric poetry, as an individual subjective will: the will of the poet. Here the sequence is: universal will-Dionysiac music-Apolline images-individual will. If we can therefore see lyric poetry as

> the imitative effulgence of music in images and concepts, we may now ask: 'How does music *appear* in the mirror of imagery and concepts?' *It appears as will* in Schopenhauer's sense of the word, as an opposite of the aesthetic, purely contemplative will-less state.[25]

Nietzsche fails here to distinguish between the notions of an individual and a universal will (or rather, a personal vs. an impersonal will), thus conceiving of the yearning of the poet as *part of* nature's own yearning. If we make such a distinction, the extent to which the lyric poet participates in nature's longing is

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[24] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §3, p. 23. ['In der sich der Hellenische "Wille" einen verklärenden Spiegel vorhielt.' KGW, III.1, p. 32.]

[25] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §6, p. 34. ['Die nachahmende Effulguration der Musik in Bildern und Begriffen betrachten, so können wir jetzt fragen: "als was *erscheint* die Musik im Spiegel der Bildlichkeit und der Begriffe?" *Sie erscheint als Wille*, das Wort im Schopenhauerischen Sinne genommen, d. h. als Gegensatz der aesthetischen rein beschaulichen willenlosen Stimmung.' KGW, III.1, p.46.]

what truly measures his disinterestedness, the relinquishing of his own individuality, and therefore the aesthetic quality of his works. This is more consistent with the rest of the theory in *The Birth of Tragedy*, as well as with Nietzsche's later 'metaphysics of the will to power' and the morality of 'self-overcoming'. By failing to make explicit such a distinction, and retaining the Schopenhauerian ambiguity which conceives of the will in both personal and impersonal terms, Nietzsche has to resort to a non-artistic duality between 'essence' and 'appearance' which does not fit well in the context of his exposition.[26]

Let us then retain only the confirmation of the dynamicity of representation that this identification of the Apolline and the mirror provides: the mirror transfigures; it does not only reflect; the mirror being part of the continuum of artistic forces, and not a line without extension that separates them, it participates in the very artistic process. According to this logic, we could go a step further and assert that, since ultimate reality *is* itself the process of artistic creation, reality's artistic overfullness with respect to itself, the structure of the mirror is here subverted: the duality between original and reflection is dissolved in an artistic continuum in which the transfiguring power

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[26] See *The Birth of Tragedy*, §6, pp. 34-35 [KGW, III.1, pp. 46-47], where to preserve the aesthetic, disinterested 'essence' of music Nietzsche comes close to denying its Dionysiac character, presenting it as mere appearance of a deeper aesthetic substratum, which is clearly inconsistent with the major tenets of the text.

of the mirror is the clear index of the interrelation between the Apolline and the Dionysiac: the mirror's image-creating power (its Apolline character) is also a creative transformation, and by being such it is also part of the reality of becoming that infinitely transforms itself.

Part of my argument in relation to Joyce and Eliot's literary texts will rely on the assumption of the mutual requirement of the Apolline and the Dionysiac artistic impulses, as a formulation that makes manifest art's internal relationship to the sacred, also involving a dynamic conception of representation. Nonetheless, Nietzsche's subscription to this point is far from unambiguous, given the clearly fundamental role that he assigns to the Dionysiac and his own inclinations in favour of Dionysiac manifestations (musical art in particular). For all this he seems to be reluctant to admit the middle ground of a reconciliation; and yet, I would claim that this reluctance is what confers on his theory its validity by virtue of a commitment to dynamism, because it is not reconciliation that is at stake here, but the infinite continuation of the struggle, of which Nietzsche's text is a re-enactment rather than a description. Ultimately, aesthetic value depends on its relation to the primal Dionysiac force (just as in Nietzsche's later thought the life-affirming forces provide the source of all value); yet the fact that the Apolline is a *necessary* counterpart prevents any statement of value made only on account of the Dionysiac, which cannot be conceived of as an independent founding force. These oscillations between the privileging of one element and the detached description of the whole are not to be taken as an undeliberate lack of

consistency, but rather as the characteristic features of a thinking of dynamism that struggles to find expression while remaining faithful to its sources. It is only through a tense language that tension can be most accurately expressed, and it is only by using a linguistic form renouncing logical completion that Nietzsche can maintain the validity of his claims without having to resort to the silence of the mystic.

1.3. The 'Synthesis' of Tragic Myth

In its attempt to overcome the fundamental inadequacy of linguistic expression, *The Birth of Tragedy* should have been a song rather than a book: 'It should have been *singing*, this 'new soul', not speaking!'[27] or, at least, it should have incorporated the musical element of tragedy itself, since it is only through music that the deepest wisdom can be attained when the mythic mode of expression cannot be fully rendered by words:

> myth does not find adequate objectification in the spoken word [of tragic drama]. The structure of the scenes and the visible images reveal a deeper wisdom than the poet himself can convey in words and concepts [...]; where the poet failed in his attempts to achieve the

[27] Nietzsche, 'Attempt at Self-Criticism', §3, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 6. ['Sie hatte *singen* sollen, diese "neue Seele" — und nicht reden!' KGW, III.1, p. 9.]

> supreme spiritualization and ideal of the myth, he was constantly successful as a musician![28]

Therefore, the most perfect artistic synthesis, tragic drama (as opposed to the exercise in speculation of *The Birth of Tragedy*) owes its success to its relation with the non-linguistic, with Dionysiac music. Nietzsche grants tragedy a high value by virtue of the way it presents the Apolline as internally related to the Dionysiac, myth related to its musical source; for, even if myth, being symbolic, belongs to the Apolline world of images, there is already in myth a dimension which cannot be fully rendered by the world of defined boundaries; if myth is a symbolic expression of the insights of Dionysiac truth, it also falls short of that which it expresses, and constitutes for the Dionysiac a trap that must be acknowledged as such:

> Dionysiac truth takes over the whole sphere of myth as a symbolic expression of its own insights, and gives its voice partly in the public cult of tragedy and partly in the secret rites of the dramatic mysteries, but always in the old mythic trappings.[29]

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[28] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §17, p. 81. ['Der Mythus findet in dem gesprochen Wort durchaus nicht seine adäquate Objectivation. Das Gefüge der Scenen und die anschaulichen Bilder offenbaren eine tiefere Weiseheit, als der Dichter selbst in Worte und Begriffe fassen kann [...];was dem Wortdichter nicht gelungen war, die höchste Vergeistigung und Idealität des Mythus zu erreichen, ihm als schöpferischem Musiker in jedem Augenblick gelingen konnte!' KGW, III.1, pp. 105-106.]

It is only in tragic drama that the articulation between the Apolline and the Dionysiac finds a perfect equilibrium, in their respective expressions of myth and music, because within such an art form a tension is maintained:

> the myth shields us from the music, just as it gives the music its supreme freedom. In return, music bestows upon the tragic myth a metaphysical significance of an urgency and conviction that word and image, without that external assistance, could never hope to attain. Above all, the tragic spectator is overcome by a sure presentiment of supreme delight attained along a road of destruction and denial, so that he feels that the very depth of things is speaking perceptibly to him.[30]

Tragedy thus appears as the instrument for the most expressive form of myth, and it does so by sheltering a constitutive structure that involves a necessary

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[29] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §10, p. 53. ['Die dionysische Wahrheit übernimmt das gesammte Bereich des Mythus als Symbolik *ihrer* Erkenntnisse und Spricht diese theils in dem öffentlichen Cultus der Tragödie, theils in den geheimen Begehungen dramatischer Mysterienfeste, aber immer unter der alten mythischen Hülle aus.' KGW, III.1, p. 69.]

[30] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §21, p. 100. ['Der Mythus schützt uns vor der Musik, wie er ihr andrerseits erst die höchste Freiheit giebt. Dafür verleiht die Musik, als Gegengeschenk, dem tragischen Mythus eine so eindringliche und überzeugende metaphysische Bedeutsamkeit, wie sie Wort und Bild, ohne jene einzige Hülfe, nie zu erreichen vermögen; und insbesondere überkommt durch sie den tragischen Zuschauer gerade jenes sichere Vorgefühl einer höchsten Lust, zu der der Weg durch Untergang und Verneinung führt, so dass er zu hören meint, als ob der innerste Abgrund der Dinge zu ihm vernehmlich spräche.' KGW, III.1, pp. 130-131.]

relationship with the Dionysiac artistic impulse in the form of a manifest denial of the Apolline: it is by undermining the success of the hero on stage, to the point of destruction, that this particular art form expresses the Dionysiac basis of all illusory individuation. This stands in contradistinction with the mythic texture of Olympian religion, which, although based on the same principles, operates a permanent concealment upon the awe-inspiring realm that lies at its basis and that is conceptualised as the primitive world of the Titans. The mythical world of the Greeks, for Nietzsche, only unveils its own truth fully in the form of tragic myth, where the opposed tendencies at stake in mythopoeia find an aesthetic form that only partly tolerates concealment.

The contest of oppositional tendencies acquires various forms within the tragic structure, in a joining that is not entirely a synthesis nor a juxtaposition: in this form tragedy also reveals the terms in which aesthetic pleasure in pain can be understood; there is joy in the return to the origin, but only at the cost of a painful break. Thus the tragic Dionysiac insight provides the

> *mystery doctrine of tragedy*: the basic understanding of the unity of all things, individuation seen as the primal source of evil, art as the joyful hope that the spell of individuation can be broken, as a presentiment of a restored oneness;[31]

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[31] Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy*, §10, p. 52. ['*Die Mysterienlehre der Tragödie* [...]: die Grunderkenntniss von der Einheit alles Vorhandenen, die Betrachtung der Individuation als des

but this mystery doctrine also conveys a terrible wisdom, and the attainment of the original unity involves violence: the principle of individuation has to be broken, and the individual itself has to experience what is seen as its own dismemberment; the Titans had to pay the same price as the tragic hero in their acquaintance with the excessive wisdom of nature:

> hubris and excess are considered the truly hostile spirits of the non-Apolline realm, and hence qualities of the pre-Apolline age, the age of the Titans [...]. It was for his Titanic love of man that Prometheus had to be torn apart by vultures; for his excessive wisdom in solving the riddle of the Sphinx that Oedipus had to be cast into a bewildering vortex of crimes.[32]

Tragedy presents us this process of dismemberment as necessarily intermingled with a rejoicing in illusions: the aesthetic pleasure of the negation of the hero is inseparable from the painful affirmation of the eternity of the real; some kind of

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Urgrundes des Uebels, die Kunst als die freudige Hoffnung, dass der Bann der Individuation zu zerbrechen sei, als die Ahnung einer wiederhergestellten Einheit.' KGW, III.1, p. 69.]

[32] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §4, p. 26. ['Selbstüberhebung und Uebermaas als die eigentlich feindseligen Dämonen der nicht-apollinischen Sphäre, daher als Eigenschaften der vor-apollinischen Zeit, des Titanenzeitalters [...] erachtet wurden. Wegen seiner titanenhaften Liebe zu den Menschen musste Prometheus von den Geiern zerrissen werden, seiner übermässigen Weisheit halber, die das Räthsel der Sphinx löste, musste Oedipus in einen verwirrenden Strudel von Unthaten stürzen.' KGW, III.1, p. 36.]

violence is always involved in representation. Conversely, some studies of the logic of sacrifice and social violence reveal the links between the sacred character of these institutions and their aesthetic mechanisms. René Girard, although trying to keep at a distance from Nietzsche's approach to the classic world,[33] shows how the representational character of ritualised forms of social violence, such as sacrifice, is precisely what grants them effectiveness, preventing the inevitable outburst of *actual* violence from creating a spiral of destruction. For Girard, the mythic sanction over ritualised violence has to be explained both as a sacralising process and as a representational one. Also on the basis of the texts of some Greek tragedies, he sees a constant sacrificial element in myth, by which historical communities, by referring violence to the mechanisms of aesthetic representation of the sacred, manage to establish solidly the fundamental principles of their survival:

> sacrifice is the boon worthy above all others of being preserved, celebrated and memorialised, reiterated and reenacted in a thousand different forms, for it alone can prevent transcendental violence from turning back into reciprocal violence, the violence that really hurts, setting man against man and threatening the total destruction of the community.[34]

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[33] See René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. P. Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) p. 55.

[34] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 124-5.

Nietzsche himself points out to the connection between art and the 'instinctive zest for life', against the *destructive* violence that stands at the opposite side in the form of

> a practical pessimism that could even produce a terrible ethic of genocide through pity, and which is, and always has been, present everywhere in the world where art has not in some form [...] appeared as a remedy and means of prevention for this breath of pestilence.[35]

Thus Girard corroborates Nietzsche's link between violence and representation: for Nietzsche, representation involves violence; for Girard, actual violence is mastered through the representational character of sacrificial violence. However, it must be pointed out that Girard's co-ordinates of understanding bear a claim to a certain scientific validity, and it is only in this respect that they are not reconcilable with Nietzsche's approach, which is genuinely philosophical in that it confronts the problems from a purely theoretical perspective. While Girard seeks an understanding based on the formulation of universally valid laws, backed by the actuality of practices of ancient cultures, Nietzsche presupposes a direct link between the actuality of those practices (the

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[35] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §15, p. 74. ['Ein praktischer Pessimismus, der selbst eine grausenhafte Ethik des Völkermordes aus Mitleid erzeugen könnte — der übrigens überall in der Welt vorhanden ist und vorhanden war, wo nicht die kunst in irgend welchen Formen [...]. zum Heitmittel und zur Abwehr jenes Pesthauchs erschienen ist.' KGW, III.1, p. 96.]

conditions of existence of our ancestors) and their resulting conceptual constructs; he can then follow the articulations of concepts and notions without having to rely on the uncritical assumptions of methodological principles which scientific discourse cannot evade, and his claims do not then bear the universality and a-temporality of scientific laws, but the truthfulness of a theory that enquires into the very origin of our notion of universality. It is because the Greeks are our cultural ancestors that such a theory can be enlightening *for us*, and the actual conditions of their existence are not a reconstructible empirical fact or a historical event (which would provide the support for some social science), but only the always already lost prerequisite for the unfolding of our Western cultural construction, with which those conditions cannot but be continuous. This important difference of approach does not preclude a philosophical use of scientific understandings of the ancient past, just as Nietzsche was ready to interpret scientific postulates of his time for his own idiosyncratic theory. The status of the claims differ, but once we suspend, say, the scientific status of Girard's claims about tragic violence in ancient Greece, we can benefit from an extension of avenues of thought that Girard opens for us in our reading of the relationships between sacred and aesthetic experience in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

1.4. The Degeneration of the Apolline: Christian Music vs. Socratism

Greek tragedy constitutes for Nietzsche the perfect contest the Apolline and the Dionysiac, but equally the alteration of this tense equilibrium results in contemptible forms of art and experience. Even in those forms of artistic life where the Apolline force was given a predominant role, such as in the case of Olympian religion, a tacit requirement of the Dionysiac counterpart was somehow present. When this need for reciprocity is forgotten, the Apolline appears under the sterile form of what Nietzsche calls Alexandrian culture, easily identifiable with what he would later regard as the historicist attitude (against the life-affirming one) in the second of his *Untimely Meditations*[36]. It is this lack of connection with its Dionysiac source that differentiates the Alexandrian from the Olympian, even if in both we find a rejoicing in the beauty of illusory forms.

For Nietzsche, Alexandrian culture is inaugurated within Greek tragedy by Euripides: he testifies to the failure to base tragedy solely on the Apolline spirit, since 'Euripidean tragedy [...] is incapable of achieving the Apolline effect of the epic, and has also made the greatest possible break with the Dionysiac elements'.[37] The delight in illusion as a counterpart to the wisdom

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[36] Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. by R. S. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 59-123.

[37] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §12, p. 61. ['Das euripideische Drama [...] ist ihm unmöglich, die apollinische Wirkung des Epos zu erreichen während es andererseits sich von den dionysischen Elementen möglichst gelölst hat.' KGW, III.1, p. 80.]

concerning the eternal unity, which found successful artistic articulation in Homeric epic, Olympian cults, lyric poetry and tragic drama, is now turned into an sterile complacency in existence, which is also a symptom of an ideology of weakness, since with the dramatic innovations of Euripides, 'the fifth state, the slaves, now came into its own [...]',[38] replacing the mighty aesthetic gestures of the past by frivolity and delight in the immediate.

This slavish turn corresponds to the invention of reason, or, more accurately, to the submission of art to the rational. Euripides' 'belief that reason was the true source of all enjoyment and creativity' inaugurated the dismantling of Greek tragedy from within. For those who could not endure the ancient tensions, a reasonable art proved to be a good substitute, but also a good narcotic, since the absence of a connection with the primordial nature of reality left the audiences with the unconsciousness of the dreaming state. Euripides' is for Nietzsche one of the first attempts to 'overthrow those ancient popular traditions, that perpetually repropagated worship of Dionysus',[39] doing away with the religious character of tragedy.

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[38] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §11, p. 56. ['Der fünfte Stand, der des Sclaven, kommt [...] jetzt zur Herrschaft.' KGW, III.1, p. 74.]

[39] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §12, p. 60. [' [...] Werfe jene alten Volkstraditionen, jene sich ewig fortpflanzende Verehrung des Dionysus nicht um.' KGW, III.1, p. 78.]

That the end of valuable art coincides for Nietzsche with the beginning of secularisation points once more to the need to think together the sacred and the aesthetic within *The Birth of Tragedy*. The parallel figure to Euripides in art is Socrates in religion and politics, who, according to Nietzsche, deserved his death sentence for his impiety, for his resistance to understanding Greek culture within the boundaries of the sacred. Aesthetic Socratism was the principle behind Euripides' new turn in tragic drama, and it was also that behind Plato's distrust of poetry, for if intelligibility becomes a condition of the beautiful, then Plato's views are justified when he 'speaks ironically of the poet's creative power, in so far as it is not a conscious insight'.[40]

Under the influence of the Socratic spirit, Plato writes his philosophical dialogues, in which 'the Apolline tendency is cocooned within its logical schematism'[41], and poetry is made dependent on dialectical thought. This is for Nietzsche another instance of the spreading power of the Socratic spirit, whose monstrosity subordinates the life-affirming character of art to the intelligibility provided by reason. However, it must be noted that, even according to

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[40] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §12, p. 64.['Redet vom schöpferischen Vermögen des Dichters, insofern dies nicht die bewusste Einsicht ist, zu allermeist nur ironisch [...].' KGW, III.1, p. 83.]

[41] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §14, p. 69. ['In dem logischen Schematismus hat sich die *apollinische* Tendenz verpuppt.' KGW, III.1, p. 90.]

Nietzsche, there is more to the Platonic dialogues than logical schematism, and that in some senses Plato is for Nietzsche a bad disciple of Socrates.[42]

Socratism, as the voice of the slavish attitude, manifested itself not only in the death of tragedy, or in the assimilating power of dialectical philosophy that results in modern science: it acquired its ultimate expression with the advent of Christian religion, whose intellectualising force and negative morality constitute for Nietzsche the traits of an unmistakably decadence. Although not explicitly attacked in *The Birth of Tragedy* (as it will be in later writings), Christianity is for Nietzsche one of the clearest realisations of the ascetic ideal that is opposed to the artistic affirmation of life. In his own criticism of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche says:

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[42] Thus in Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §190: 'There is something in the morality of Plato that does not really belong to Plato but is only to be met with in his philosophy, one might say, in spite of Plato: namely Socratism, for which he was really too noble. [...] Plato did everything he could in order to read something refined and noble into his teacher's proposition [...]'. (trans. by R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p. 95). [Es giebt Etwas in der Moral Plato's, das nicht eigentlich zu Plato gehört, sondern sich nur an seiner Philosophie vorfindet, man könnte sagen, trotz Plato: nämlich der Sokratismus, für den er eigentlich zu vernehm war. [...] Plato hat alles gethan, um etwas Feines und Vornehmes in den Satz seines Lehres hinein zu interpretiren [...]. (KGW, VI.2, p. 113)]. See also our discussion of the mythic in Plato in chapter 4.

> with this questionable book, my instinct, an affirmative instinct for life, turned *against* morality and invented a fundamentally opposite doctrine and valuation of life, purely artistic and *anti-Christian*.[43]

Therefore, there is a continuity that links the Socratic misunderstanding of Greek culture to the negativity of Christian religion, which is itself a secularisation of a more profoundly sacred vision: that of the ancient world. Our modern, Alexandrian religious experience prompts Nietzsche's cry:

> who [...] would dare appeal to our pallid and weary religions, which have degenerated in their fundamentals into scholarly religions? Myth, the prerequisite for all religions, is already thoroughly paralysed.[44]

However, just as the Apolline tendency of Olympian religion presupposed its Dionysiac counterpart, we may wonder whether the authenticity of an aesthetic understanding of the sacred, of the type that Greek tragedy showed, cannot also

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[43] Nietzsche, 'Attempt at Self-Criticism', §5, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 9. ['*Gegen* die Moral also kehrte sich damals, mit diesem fragwürdigen Buche, mein Instinkt, als ein fürsprechender Instinkt des Lebens, und erfand sich eine grundsätzliche Gegenlehre und Gegenwerthung des Lebens, eine rein artistische, eine *antichristliche*.' KGW, III.1, p. 13.]

[44] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §18, p. 87. ['Wer wagt es [...] sicheren Muthes an unsere blassen und ermüdeten Religionen zu appelliren, die selbst in ihren Fundamenten zu Gelehrtenreligionen entartet sind: so dass der Mythus, die nothwendige Voraussetzung jeder Religion, bereits überall gelähmt ist .' KGW, III.1, p. 113.]

be found within the secularised visions that the Socratic force has imposed on our modern world. And we may also wonder whether the persistence of such a Dionysiac sacredness stands not only as a detached counterpart, a reminder or a remedy, but as an internal requirement of a process that does not fully surrender to analysis. Nietzsche provides the grounds for a positive answer when he intends to explain

> how the influence of Socrates, up to our own times and beyond, has spread across posterity like a shadow lengthening in the evening sun, and how it has continually led to the regeneration of art — in the broadest and deepest, metaphysical sense — and by its own infinity guarantees the infinity of art.[45]

The terms of this artistic regeneration within the Socratic (and not only against the Socratic), the possibility of a 'music-making Socrates'[46], is matched within Nietzsche's thought by an understanding of the elements of sacredness in

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[45] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §15, p. 71. ['Wie der Einfluss des Sokrates, bis auf diesen Moment hin, ja in alle Zukunft hinaus, sich, gleich einem in der Abendsonne immer grösser werdenden Schatten, über die Nachwelt hin ausgebreitet hat, wie derselbe zur Neuschaffung der *Kunst* — und zwar der Kunst im bereits metaphysischen, weitesten und tiefsten Sinne — immer wieder nöthigt und, bei seiner eignen Unendlichkeit, auch deren Unendlichkeit verbürgt.' KGW III.1, p. 93.]

[46] See Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §15, p. 75. ['Des *musiktreibenden* Sokrates'. KGW III.1, p. 98.]

Christianity which escape Christianity's own secularising power, and is best understood by reference to the structure of interplay of sacredness and the aesthetic which we find in the theory of artistic forces presented in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Thus, in the notebooks previous to the composition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, we find the surprisingly corroborating statements of Nietzsche's understanding of Christianity's internal tension. What is even more surprising, given Nietzsche´s often explicit alignment of Christianity with a diseased and slavish Apolline tendency, is the recognition of a continuity between the Dionysiac Greek world and that of Christianity:

> the hellenic world of Apollo is subjugated little by little by the power of *inner* Dionysiac forces: Christianity found tis already prepared.[47]

Thus, the struggle that characterised classical Greece seems to be reaching an end, but it is Christianity that takes over this struggle, and tries to end the aesthetic tension with the overwhelming power of its Dionysiac, oriental, intoxicating power:

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[47] ['Die Hellenische Welt des Apollo wird allmählich von den dionysischen Mächten innerlich überwältigt. Das Christenthum fand *sich* bereits *for*.' KGW III.3, fragment 7[3], p.145.] I am indebted for this and the remaining Nietzsche references in this chapter to Dr Brobjer (Uppsala Universitet , Sweden). This translation and subsequent ones in this chapter are mine, unless otherwise stated.

> the highest deed of the Hellenic world: the taming of the oriental music of Dionysus and its preparation for the expression in images [...]. With the oriental Christian movement the old Dionysiac spirit innundated the world, and all the work of the Hellenic spirit seemed in vain. A deeper worldview, a non-artistic one, is on the way.
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> But it is only on the way, and in fact Christianity, as Nietzsche will enact in the form of a tension in his later writings, preserves this tension betweeen the Dionysiac groundlessness and the expression in clear images. The Lutheran chorale and the music of Palestrina, mentioned in *The Birth of Tragedy* as this kind of aesthetic achievement out of the Apolline-Dionysiac tension, prove that there is within Christianity room for a view that is more than a 'deeper, non-artistic one'.

It is interesting to see how in this early notes Nietzsche sees the danger of these of the loss of the aesthetic dimension of Christianity's *Dionysiac* character, in its excessive orientalism, in its distance from the Greek, Olympian and ultimately Socratic yearning for clarity and light. We would like to suggest that the progression of Nietzsche's work re-enacts the very tension that *The Birth of Tragedy* describes, between a Dionysiac intoxicating version of Christianity, in this early notes, and the thirst for knowledge in the writings immediately following and including *Human, All Too Human*; between the Dionysiac emphasis on self-overcoming and the disqualification of the slavish, Socratic element of Christianity in his last writings.

In particular, the tension between knowledge and art is found already in these early notes:

> Empedocles is the pure tragic man. His jump into the Etna — thirst for knowledge! He yearned for art and found only knowledge.[48]

Later in his life Nietzsche was searching for a formulation of the tension between knowledge and art:

> Art in the service of illusion—such is our form of worship. Loving and fostering life for the sake of knowledge, loving and fostering error and illusion for the sake of life. Giving existence an aesthetic meaning, *increasing our taste for it*, is the basic condition of the passion for knowledge.[49]

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[48] ['Empedocles ist der reine tragische Mensch. Sein sprung in den Aetna aus — Wissenstrieb! Er sehnte sich nack Kunst und fand nur das wissen.' KGW III.3, fragment 5[94], p. 122.]

[49] [Die Kunst als die Pflege des Wahnes—unser Cultus. Um des Erkennens willen das Leben lieben und fördern, um des Lebens willen das Irren Wähnen lieben und fördern. Dem Dasein eine ästhetische Bedeutung geben, *unseren Geschmack an ihm mehren*, ist Grundbedingung aller Leidenschaft der Erkenntniß. (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente. Frühjahr 1881 bis Sommer 1882*, in KGW II, fragment 11[162], p. 402. Quoted by Sarah Kofman in *Nietzsche et la métaphore*. París. Galilée, 1983. p. 189, as §582 of book III of *Volonté de puissance*.) English translation supplied by Duncan Large in Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*. ed. and trans. by Duncan Large, London: The Athlone Press, 1993.

But, from the beginning, the excellence of art will be linked to the original Hellenic struggle which had a Dionysiac groundless soil to be actualised in images. It is then only consequent that the most accomplished of the Gospels in literary terms, participated for Nietzsche in this Hellenic world:

> *St John's Gospel* out of a Greek atmosphere, born out of Dionysiac soil: its influence on Christianity, in opposition to the Judaic.[50]

Equally, when literature loses its truly religious dimension, as with the trivialisation of tragedy by Euripides according to Nietzsche, new avenues have to be sought for the expression of sacred art; against the secularising modern Shakespeare, the music of the mysteries of the church:

> *Shakespeare*. The realisation of Sophocles. The Dionysiac is completely absorbed by images. The suppression of the chorus is entirely justified.: but at the same time the Dionysiac element is lost. This takes refuge in the mysteries. It emerges in Christianity, and it produces a new music.[51]

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[50] [Das *Johannesevangelium* aus griechischer Atmosphaere, aus dem Boden des Dionysischen geboren: sein Einfluss auf das Christenthum, im Gegensatzt zum Jüdischen.' , KGW III.3, fragment 7[13], p. 147.]

[51] [*Shakespeare*. Erfüllung des Sophocles. Das Dionysische ist rein in Bildern aufgegangen. Die Weglassung des Chors war ganz berechtig: aber man ließ zugleich das sionysische Element schwinden. Dieses flüchtet sich in die Mysterien. Es bricht im Christenthum hervor und es

Therefore, if Christianity as a whole is explicitely compatible with aesthetic excellence, who is the true destroyer of the Dionysiac-Apolline spirit; who breaks the Hellenic tension that Christianity inherits? As already pointed out, a certain form of disease of the Apolline, in which Socrates participates:

> The theoretical genius as the destroyer of Hellenic Apolline art. Against this, the world- picture of philosophy, Christianity, and in general of instinctive forces: from the ruins of a destroyed art arises the mystic. Against illusory representations: new world images are opposed, which are broken down with logic again and demand new creations. An ever more solid basis, an ever more careful construction, complexes of thought ever larger, work together, and this is the world-mission of the Hellenes and Socrates. It seems as if myth were pregressively excluded. In fact, myth becomes of deeper meaning, and more magnificent, because acknowledged regularity is ever more magnificent.[52]

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gebiert eine neue Musik.', KGW III.3fragment 7[134], pp. 201-202.] Incidentally, let us remember that modern European drama, as it is pointed out above in 3.2, arises out of Christian mysteries.

[52] [Der theoretische Genius asl Vernichter der heelenischen apollinischen Kunst: dagegen die Weltbilder der Philosophie und des Christenthums und Religion, überhaupt der instinktiven Mächte: aus den Ruinen der zertören Kunst blüht die Mystik. Gegen die Wahnvorstellungen: neue Weltbilder entgegen gestellt, die dann wieder logisch zersetzt werden und zu neuen Schöpfungen auffordern. Immer solider die Grundlage, immer vorsichtiger der Bau, immer größere Denkkomplexe arbeiten suzammen, dies die Weltmission des Hellenischen und der

It seems that this destruction has not been completed, and maybe can never be completed: myth becomes more magnificent in the regularities of theory, and the theoretical genius cannot fully erase the ruins of a destroyed art out of which arises the mystic. It is true that the power of logic and the theoretical genius has been at times oppressive throughout history:

> one is thrown into the mythic conception. But, immediately, logical thinking so much brings to the surface the opposite power that, throughout millenia, logic gags.[53]

However, these are nothing but the static stages of a fight essentially dynamic in nature, whose intervals of reconciliation adopt forms that Nietzsche dares to suggests:

> The fight between these two forms of art: the philosophical world-images declare themseves to be verifiable truth; the religious ones, to be non-verifiable truth: therefore, revelation. A joining is possible: on

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Sokrates. Scheinbar wird ja der Mythus immer mehr ausgeschlossen. In Wahrheit wird der Mythus immer tiefsinniger und großartiger, weil die Erkannte Gesetzmäßigkeit immer großartiger wird'. KWG III.3, fragment 6[12], p. 139.]

[53] [Man wird zur mystischen Conception gedrängt. Sodann aber drängt überhaupt die Wucht des logischen Denkes die Gegenmacht hervor, die dann mitunter auf Jahrtausende die Logik in Bande Schließt'. KWG III.3, fragment 6[12], p. 139.]

> the one hand, a rigorous setting of the limits of logic; on the other, the acknowledgment that illusion is necessary for our existence.[54]

Let us notice that this conflict between the theoretical genius (represented by philosophy in this case) and religious truth is set within an aesthetic framework: they are forms of *art*. This corroborates the internal link between the sacred and the aesthetic in *The Birth of Tragedy* that the previous pages have tried to unveil, but it also gives us a clue for an understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole in terms of an aesthetic tension:

> This [the fight between philosophical world-images and religious ones] is the opposition between the Apolline and the Dionysiac, which can find a joining in tragic art and music, and which reaches here the goal of its conflict. All the illusory character of the world, and that of art too, has to appear to us as already developed: but it must develop itself again — an astral flux.[55]

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[54] ['Kampf dieser beiden Formen der Kunst: die philosophischen Weltbilder behaupten sich als erweisbare Wahrheit, die religiösen als nicht erweisbare, darum geoffenbarte W<ahrheit>. Gegensatz des theorischen Genies und des religiösen Genies. Es ist eine Vereinigung möglich: einmal schärfste Bestimmung der Grenze des Logischen, anderseits die Erkenntniß, daß zu unsrer Existenz der Schein nöthig ist'. KWG III.3, fragment 6[12], p. 139.]

[55] ['Dies der neue Gegensatz des Apollinischen und des Dionysichen, der in der tragischen Kunst und Musik eine Vereinigung finden kann, die hier das Ziel des Confliktes erreicht. Die volle Scheinbarkeit der Welt, auch die Kunst muß uns als entwickelt sich zeigen: aber sie muß sich wieder abwickeln. — Einfluß der Gestirne'. KWG III.3, fragment 6[12], p. 140.]

In this unresolved development, presented itself as artistically illusory, we can find a key for the interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy of becoming, in his notions of the eternal return, and the instability and need for self-overcoming of the human. This is going to be my line of interpretation, in the positive spirit of a music-making Socrates which Nietzsche allows himself to imagine.

2. Nietzsche and the Aesthetics of Metonymy

The distinction between aesthetic detachment and Dionysiac contagion that *The Birth of Tragedy* articulates can be reformulated by applying it to one of its sides — to the realm of aesthetic representation proper — in order to elucidate the relationships between different representational modes. The capacity for the Apolline/Dionysiac distinction to be reproduced beyond its own limits is pointed out by Nietzsche himself in *The Birth of Tragedy*, when he qualifies both the Apolline and Dionysiac states as artistic and illusory, that is, as both falling within the realm of artistic product, rather than, as it would be expected, within the realm of artistic product and artistic production respectively. If Nietzsche can push the Apolline/Dionysiac distinction beyond its own limits it is because this very distinction contains a displacing power prior to any task of demarcation (prior to the original Apolline illusion of limits), and therefore re-inscribes itself as distinction within as well as without the limits which it defines. In fact, *The Birth of Tragedy* primarily sees the Apolline and the Dionysiac not as oppositions to some reality that precedes them, but rather the contrary, the emphasis being placed on them as original forces whose interaction gives rise to aesthetic products (and therefore logically preceding this production). In any case, whether the Apolline/Dionysiac distinction qualifies the genesis of art or the taxonomy or art´s outcome, the mobility to which these two opposed perspectives testify allows for a third option that this chapter attempts to exploit: the articulation of the Apolline and the Dionysiac as

constitutive of art´s definitory inner operations.

The Birth of Tragedy emphasises the genetic character of these primary impulses: the Dionysiac and Apolline forces constitute art´s excess with respect to itself, and cannot be fully apprehended through the analysis of art´s internal logic. Without challenging this position, it is still possible to draw an analogic line between the articulation of aesthetic forces, according to *The Birth of Tragedy*, and that of divergent modes of aesthetic representation; in the drawing of this analogy, the nature of some notions of art theory appears under a new light.

2.1. Representation as Rhetoric

For the establishing of a paradigm of modes of aesthetic representation let us again turn to Nietzsche, this time to his fascination with rhetoric and rhetorical tropes. According to Nietzsche's own understanding of rhetorical tropes, there is room for a theory that holds these as irreducible modes of engagement with reality, and therefore there is room for a theory that uses rhetorical tropes as indexes of semiotic categories, in order to explain the functioning of systems of signs in general, including aesthetic systems of signs. The aesthetic import of all signification will become clearer later, but for the moment let us say that there is for Nietzsche an ineluctable aesthetic element in all sign-producing and all perceiving. His theory of language in his early writings (which to an extent incidental for our purposes merges with a theory of

perception), opens a chasm between the realm of reality and the realm of meaning, bridged only by the aesthetic:

> in any case it seems to me that the 'correct perception' — which would mean 'the adequate expression of an object in the subject' — is a contradictory impossibility. For between two absolute different spheres, as between subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression; there is, at most, an *aesthetic* relation.[1]

Thus, for his theory of language, seeing language as instrument of mediation between subject and object, Nietzsche resorts to rhetoric, and the context of the exposition of this theory (with its talk of 'images', 'illusions' and 'essences') suggests that its conclusions can be extended to a general theory of representation (probably for the same reason for which semiotic studies have never completely managed to shake off their dependence on linguistic models). Linguistic representation, as the archetype of meaning-creating confrontation with reality, is governed, for Nietzsche, by the rules of persuasion:

> the question of how an act of the soul can be presented through a sound image must be asked. If completely accurate representation is to take place, should the material in which it is to be represented, above all, not be the same as that in which the soul works? However, since it is something alien — the sound — how then can something come forth

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense'(1873), in Daniel Breazeale (ed. and trans.), *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1979), p. 86. These notebooks seem to be still not available in the Colli and Montinari edition in German.

more accurately as an *image*? It is not the things that pass over into consciousness, but the manner in which we stand toward them, the *pithanon* [power of persuasion (plausibility; also a thing producing illusion)]. The full essence of things will never be grasped. [...] Instead of the thing, the sensation takes in only a *sign*. That is the *first* aspect: *language is rhetoric* [...].[2]

Yet for all its emphasis on the craftsmanship of the rhetor, as opposed to the spontaneity of a natural language, Nietzsche seems to endorse here far too many metaphysical postulates:[3] the positing of 'essences', of 'things' prior to representation; the existence of a primal reality which then language encounters. The emphasis on the rhetorical nature of language, already present here and to be developed in later writings into a privileging of interpretation over truth, is however no innocent displacement of the hierarchy of the 'proper' or the 'primordial'. What characterises language is not its relationship with a substratum of reality whose rendering happens to be rhetorical (both in terms of tropes and in terms of persuasion, although there is no clearly established link here): rather, the fact that language is essentially rhetorical conditions any

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[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric'(1872-73), in Sander L. Gilman, C. Blair and D. J. Parent (ed. and trans.), *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language* (Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 23. My underlining. Translator's addition.

[3] There remains some unclearness about the lack of transcendentalism in Nietzsche´s early rhetorical notions, in particular in that of metaphor. See in this respect Tracy B. Strong, 'Aesthetic Authority and Tradition: Nietzsche and the Greeks', in *History of European Ideas*, Vol. II, 1989, p. 997.

approach to its assumed substratum, to the effect that reality becomes secondary in respect to the rhetorical operations upon reality which language performs. Then our objection can be modified, and state that what takes place here, as in a placing of interpretation over truth, is just an inverted metaphysics, in which the grounding character of primordial reality has now been shifted to the dynamic of rhetorical procedures. To this it can be answered that making reality depend upon a plurality of rhetorical modes of persuasion, or truth upon interpretation, cannot possibly correspond to the structure of an inverted metaphysics, since the multiple and dynamic character of what is now taken as primary defies the conditions of stability required for the positing of a fundamental split between two worlds; it is also important to note that the notions of reality and truth are not *replaced* by those of rhetorical devices and interpretation: rather, it is precisely as functions of rhetorical and interpretative *activities* that it makes sense to talk of reality and truth.

Thus the primacy of rhetoric in Nietzsche's notes for a theory of language, which can be seen as a precedent of his later privileging of interpretation over truth, still retains a commitment to the irreducibility of the non-linguistic to the rhetorical forces constitutive of language, even if this non-reducible realm should not, in all rigour, have been talked of as that of 'essences' or 'things'. Nietzsche's resort to this vocabulary, inheritance of his youthful devotion to Kant and Schopenhauer, ought not to obscure the fact that the context of ideas in which these terms occur has already done away with their metaphysical import, and this vocabulary now takes on the value of that which is a function of rhetorical activity, *without* completely losing its authoritative

connotations. That is to say: with Nietzsche, metaphysics is not inverted but displaced, put at play, assimilated to a structure of immanence. This may become clearer in the context of a theory of interpretation, since there the *absolute* of the *original text* is clearly for Nietzsche nothing but a function of the dynamic of interpretation. There is, according to Sarah Kofman, no

> original text independent of interpretations. It is precisely this text which rigorous philology would decipher and which would allow one to distinguish interpretations from one another [...]. If this were so, then rigorous philology would arrive at the essence of being , and Nietzsche's philosophy would be an ontology which it would be hard to tell apart from a demystified form of dogmatic metaphysics. As Heidegger has it, Nietzscheanism would then be nothing but an inverted Platonism. [...] The goal of rigorous philology is therefore not to separate the text from its interpretations — which is impossible since the text is constituted by them — but to distinguish a certain type of interpretation from other interpretations.[4]

And if interpretations are defined in relation to the powers that they serve, the rhetorical operations of language upon its referent seem to be motivated by their persuasive force, by their ability to convince regardless of accuracy. This view would be consistent with Nietzsche's reduction of representational activities to power relations, but it is not explicitly linked with the main account of meaning-creation that he gives in his early notes, unless we force the connections and we say that, after all, metaphor, the main process of meaning-creation according to

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[4] Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, trans. and ed. by Duncan Large (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), p.135.

Nietzsche, has been regarded by the tradition as one of the 'master tropes'.

Leaving aside the question of the link between persuasion, power and tropes, the significance of this move is that rhetorical mechanisms, and that of metaphorical transference above all, are used to explain the origin of language and its primary nature. Behind the celebrated phrase of truth as a 'movable host of metaphors'[5] is a theory of language that regards meaning and concept formation as the result of a series of metaphorical moves:

> the *tropes*, the non-literal significations, are considered to be the most artistic means of rhetoric. But, with respect to their meanings, all words are tropes in themselves, and from the beginning. Instead of what truly takes place, they present a sound image, which fades away with time.[6]

And this sound image has already been the result of metaphorical transpositions:

> to begin with, a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first

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[5] Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense', in Breazeale, *Philosophy and Truth*, p. 84.

[6] Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric', in Gilman et al., *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, p. 23. ['Als wichtiges Kunstmittel der Rhetorik gelten die *Tropen*, die uneigentlichen Bezeichnungen. Alle Wörter aber sind an sich und von Angang an, in Bezug auf ihre Bedeutung. Tropen. Statt des wahreb Vorgangs stellen sie ein in der Zeit verklingendes Tondbild hin.' (Ibid., p.22)]

> metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated in a sound: second metaphor.[7]

Rather than a contrast with contemporary or superseded theories of language gestation and acquisition, what is relevant here is to note how Nietzsche extends the applicability of the metaphorical scheme to a realm that falls clearly outside it: with this use metaphor is no longer a 'figure', but a founding structure which nevertheless has its origin in its being a 'figure'. Further, concept formation is an operation that depends on those metaphors having already solidified and not having been taken as such:

> everything which distinguishes man from the animal depends upon this ability to volatilise perceptual metaphors in a schema, and thus to dissolve an image into a concept. [...] Even the concept — which is as bony, foursquare, and transposable as a die — is nevertheless merely the *residue of a metaphor*.[8]

From this passage it can be seen that assigning a primary role to rhetorical operations in linguistic representation creates the problem of the status of one's own theory. Such a theory must now show awareness of the primary character of that which underlies the instruments of theoretical analysis: in other words, a purely conceptual engagement with the theory of the rhetorical substratum of concepts would betray itself. It is for this reason that

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[7] Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense', p. 82.

[8] Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense', p. 85.

> Nietzsche inaugurates a type of philosophy which deliberately uses metaphors, at the risk of being confused with poetry. Such a confusion would not be regrettable in Nietzsche's eyes: for the opposition between philosophy and poetry derives from metaphysical thinking; it is based on the fictitious separation of the real and the imaginary, or the no less fictitious separation of the 'faculties'. Philosophy is a form of poetry.[9]

Yet this is so only to the extent that philosophy also constitutes a full engagement with the rhetorical essence of language, as poetry does, this engagement being essentially different in nature; for, as Kofman points out,[10] the accuracy of language and the task of unmasking remain typically philosophical, even if in the relentless pursuit of truth we can only use one set of rhetorical devices against another in the hope that truth will emerge as the very process of interaction. Thus,

> the philosopher does not just 'play' with metaphors; his play is of a 'formidable seriousness', for it is designed to oppose modernity's hatred for art, to obliterate precisely the opposition between play and seriousness, dream and reality.[11]

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[9] Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, p. 17.

[10] See Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, p. 18.

[11] Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, p. 18.

Even though 'obliteration' is too strong a word, there is a sense in which, under the light of Nietzsche's thought, these boundaries are redefined, and in which Nietzsche's early assertion about the nature of philosophy holds true:

> philosophy is invention beyond the limits of experience, it is the continuation of the mythical drive.[12]

The full extent of the mythic import of philosophy should not occupy us now;[13] let us pay attention for the moment only to the fact that the philosophical text must show an explicit awareness of the primary nature of rhetorical operations if it concedes, as Nietzsche does, that those operations extend beyond the realm of artistically crafted discourse to the very processes of language-constitution. Sarah Kofman provides an analysis of one of the aspects through which Nietzsche shows this awareness: his sustained use of metaphors.[14]

And yet something seems to be hidden behind this primacy of one of the 'master tropes'. Already in Nietzsche there seems to be a tension between this privileging of metaphor and, not only the context of persuasion of rhetorical

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[12] Nietzsche, 'The Philosopher: Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge'(1872), in Breazeale, p. 19, paragraph 53.

[13] A discussion of this point is provided in chapter 4.

[14] See Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, chapter IV.

artifacts, but also the different logic of a different trope: metonymy.[15] If concepts operate on 'perceptual metaphors', on a replacement of a stimulus by an image, and of an image by a sound, the operation by which concepts are formed is of metonymic character: no longer a substitution of an item for a different one, but an item being replaced by one of its aspects:

> language never expresses something completely but displays only a characteristic which appears to be prominent to it. [...] A partial perception takes the place of the entire and complete intuition.[16]

Thus, another rhetorical trope is given primary importance in the formation of language, and its legitimacy, as a rhetorically valid item opposed to logic is, as in the case of metaphor, clearly asserted. Talking of the thought of Thales, Nietzsche writes:

> The whole world is moist: *therefore being moist is the whole world.* Metonymy. A false inference. A predicate is confused with a sum of

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[15] Let us advance as provisional points of reference some classical definitions of metaphor in contrast with metonymy: while metaphor is the transposition of the meaning of one term into another, based on a relationship of similarity or analogy (e.g. 'pearls' for 'teeth'), metonymy operates this transposition based on a relationship of actual or conceptual proximity or contiguity (e.g. 'keel' for 'vessel'; physical contiguity which involves a substitution of the whole by a part, 'death' for 'poison': conceptual proximity: effect for cause).

[16] Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric', p. 23. ['Die Sprache drückt niemals etwas volständig aus, sondern hebt nur ein ihr hervorstechend scheinendes Merkal hervor.' (ibid., p.22)

predicates (definition).

Logical thinking was employed very little by the Ionians and developed quite slowly. But, false inferences are more correctly understood as metonymies, i.e. they are more correctly understood rhetorically and poetically.

All rhetorical figures (i.e. the essence of language) are *logically invalid inferences*. This is the way that reason begins.[17]

Therefore Nietzsche has room not only for metaphor, but also for metonymy, a trope traditionally used as a contrast to metaphor. In Nietzsche's handling of these notions, it seems that metaphor retains an all-encompassing character, and metonymy is defined only in relation to metaphor and sometimes even as one of its species. This is not surprising, given metaphor's history of pre-eminence, but I would like to argue that the apparently secondary engagement of Nietzsche with metonymy as a mode of representation contains the key for an understanding of the primacy of metaphor as well as of Nietzsche's aesthetic ideas at large.

The conceptualisation of metaphor and metonymy as modes of representation that surpass their originary nature as rhetorical tropes is already at work in Nietzsche's approach to these notions. Yet to explore their implications fully it is useful at this stage to resort to an influential text in the history of the studies of systems of representation: Roman Jakobson's 'Two Aspects of

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[17] Nietzsche, 'The Philosopher', in Breazeale, p. 48, paragraphs 141-142.

Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances' (1956)[18]. Here metaphor and metonymy are placed at the extreme poles of a twofold structure of representation, and a set of associations is established across linguistic theory, speech disturbance analysis and theory of aesthetic genres. It can be argued that this article inaugurates a contemporary tradition of oversimplification of a complexity that rhetoric has enjoyed as an autonomous discipline over the centuries. Such is the position of Brian Vickers; for him, a

> tradition behind the atrophy of rhetoric in modern theory reduces the tropes to two only, metaphor and metonymy. The instigator of this reduction was of course Roman Jakobson, who wanted to apply 'purely *linguistic* criteria to the interpretation and classification' of aphasia.[19]

Certainly Jakobson's structuralist linguistics regards itself, most probably without legitimacy, as invested with enough authority to apply the scheme of binary oppositions to a tradition which is by its very essence multiple and organic. Yet we would like to defend this move, provided that it does not attempt a redefinition of disciplinary boundaries; that is, provided that it does not try to reduce rhetoric to linguistics, but only to make use of rhetorical distinctions for its own linguistic purposes. The history of the influence of

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[18] In Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague, 1956), pp. 55-82, reprinted in Roman Jakobson, *On Language*, ed. by Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston (Harvard University Press. 1990), pp. 115-133.

[19] Brian Vickers. *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 442.

Jakobson's notions seems to make this defence even more difficult, since, in Vickers' words,

> the effects of Jakobson's dichotomizing reduction of rhetoric have [...] been disastrous, as a whole critical school has attempted to read literature solely in terms of metaphor versus metonymy, ignoring all other verbal devices.[20]

Our intention is not to enter the polemic between those defending the integrity of rhetoric as an autonomous discipline and those welcoming its merging with twentieth-century developments of linguistic discourses, but only to find support in the degree within which it is legitimate to transpose categories from discipline to discipline in order to arrive at a better understanding of *foundational* notions. Nietzsche's extension of rhetorical procedures to our primary encounters with reality was not aimed at turning rhetoric into a theory of representation: rather, it tried to understand the theory of representation *on the model* of rhetoric; after all, history records him primarily as a philosophical thinker, not as a rhetorician, nor even a philologist. In an analogous way, Nietzsche's early emphasis on the recognition of the artistic value of existence, for all its literalness, did not need to involve the abandonment of independent artistic pursuits. Bearing this distinction in mind we can, for our convenience, delineate an understanding of representational procedures based on the polar opposition of metonymy and metaphor, these taken as semiotic categories whose meaning exceeds that of their strict, rhetorical definition.

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[20] Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, p. 448.

2.2. Similarity versus Contiguity

Jakobson's use of the notions of metaphor and metonymy revolves around structuralist binary oppositions, and is particularly dependent on the Saussurean distinction between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of language. While along the paradigmatic axis linguistic items relate to one another by virtue of their potentiality to substitute one another's position in uttered speech, along the constituted speech chain (the syntagmatic axis) linguistic items relate to one another in the form of a context; while as speakers we *select* items from a code structured in paradigmatic, 'vertical' series, we also *combine* them 'horizontally' in order to form meaningful utterances; the capacity for items to be selected equals their capacity to be substituted, and their combinatory possibilities depend on a context governed by syntactic rules.[21] Thus there are two types of meaning applying to each level of significative linguistic units:

> a given significative unit may be replaced by other, more explicit sign of the same code, whereby its general meaning is revealed, while its contextual meaning is determined by its connection with other signs within the same sequence.[22]

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[21] In broad terms, the paradigmatic belongs to the Saussurean *parole*, as the structured system of possible linguistic items, whereas the syntagmatic belongs to the *langue*, or the actual chain of uttered speech which is also underlied by structural rules.

[22] Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language', p. 120.

So far these postulates lie themselves open to standard criticisms of the then emerging structuralist linguistics, which would find no suitable place here. What makes these distinctions bring about more general problems is Jakobson's inclusion of and emphasis on another associated pair: similarity and contiguity.

> the constituents of a context are in a state of *contiguity*, while in a substitution set signs are linked by various degrees of *similarity* which fluctuate between the equivalence of synonyms and the common core of antonyms.[23]

Thus, the two modes of organisation of linguistic systems (paradigmatic and syntagmatic) are to be understood as governed by two primary forms of sign production, similarity and contiguity, and the operativeness of these is linked to the realm of meaning distinctions. There is only one step from here to identifying these two modes of sign production, similarity and contiguity, with metaphoric and metonymic tendencies respectively. Thus Jakobson supports with a modern linguistic theory Nietzsche's remarks about the indissociability of rhetoric and language. As evidence, Jakobson supplies results observed in subjects with aphasic disturbances, whose utterances follow a consistent pattern, either being ruled by a metaphoric tendency, using only *selective* modes of linguistic organisation, or being ruled by a metonymic tendency, producing utterances unintelligible without a *context* that is missing.

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[23] Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language', p. 120.

But Jakobson seems to be thinking of metaphor and metonymy in even broader terms, as general modes of representation exceeding verbal language: he applies his dichotomy to a number of artistic productions (avant-garde painting and cinema, for instance), and most notably, he even advances a theory of literary genres on this model, according to which narrative fiction is metonymic in essence, whereas poetry is metaphoric. The influence of these patterns has reached literary criticism (to the despair of detractors, such as Vickers, mentioned above), and has proved relatively useful in accounting for the characterisation of literary periods. David Lodge offers a picture of Modernist fiction based on this distinction, even though he stresses that the often agreed-upon 'poetic' and therefore 'metaphorical' tendency in Modernist fiction is compatible with a use of metonymy which is also typically Modernist:

> the interesting conclusion follows that modern fiction may be characterised by an extreme or mannered drive toward the metonymic pole of language to which the novel naturally inclines, as well as by a drive toward the metaphoric pole from which it is naturally remote.[24]

Yet it can still be argued that these clear-cut distinctions ignore a history in which even the characterisation of metaphor and metonymy could not be reduced to the single note of similarity or contiguity of meaning. Aristotle's

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[24] David Lodge, 'The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy', in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds.), *Modernism: 1890-1930* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 486.

account, as Nietzsche also records,[25] includes what we would call *synecdoche* (a species of metonymy) in his definition of metaphor, and even his emphasis on *analogia* (often translated as 'proportion') reaches far beyond the strictness of 'similarity'.

A middle stage, escaping Aristotelian ambiguity but still not reaching dichotomisation, is Nietzsche's own use of the definition of these tropes in the notes for his Rhetoric lectures. Drawing from nineteenth century treatises as well as classical sources, he maintains the distinction between synecdoche and metonymy: while synecdoche takes place 'when the whole is known from a small part or a part from the whole'[26], metonymy is 'the substitution of cause and effect'.[27] We can see that in both cases contiguity is at work, as opposed to similarity in metaphor, since 'the *metaphor* is a shortened simile'.[28]

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[25] 'Aristotle (Poetics, 21) distinguishes in this way: a metaphor is the carrying over of a word whose usual meaning is something else, either from the genus to the species, from the species to the genus, from species to species, or according to proportion'(Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric', p. 55 (see also p. 198)).

[26] Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric', p. 57. ['Cum res tota parva de parte cognoscitur, aut de toto pars.' (ibid., p. 56)]

[27] Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric', p. 25. ['Vertauschung von Ursache und Wirkung'. (ibid. p. 24)

[28] Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric', p. 55. ['Die *Metapher* ist ein kürzeres Gleichniss'. (ibid., p. 54)

Therefore, there seem to be grounds for the binary opposition that has persisted after Jakobson, and while no elements have been found that could reduce the two terms to a common ground,[29] some studies, in the Jakobsonian tradition, provide reasons for the adopting of the pair similarity-contiguity, excluding the differences in contiguity between synecdoche and metonymy. Thus Umberto Eco argues that

> when its is specified that synecdoche carries out a substitution within the *conceptual content* of a term, while metonymy acts outside of that content, its is hard to see why the part for the whole is a synecdoche and the material for the object a metonymy — as though it were 'conceptually' essential for an object to have constituent parts and not to be made of some material.[30]

Thus he concludes that the distinction is based on a prejudice belonging to a philosophical tradition for which

> to perceive and to recognize the formal characteristics of a thing meant to grasp its 'universal' essence, to recognize that thing as the individual of a species related to a genus.[31]

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[29] See Eco's attempt in his definitions in terms of identity or interdependence of semantic units, in Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1976). p. 280.

[30] Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (London: McMillan, 1984). p. 90.

There are, then, grounds for an account of metaphor and metonymy (with synecdoche as a species of metonymy) that takes them as poles of a binary opposition and as operating on the basis of similarity and contiguity relationships respectively. Such an account is at variance with a traditional understanding of rhetorical tropes, but it may prove enlightening in the construction of discourses which do not necessarily have to be in competition with Rhetoric as a discipline. Whether that is the case in structuralist linguistics or in semiotic studies is of little importance here, since our approach takes even a further step away in order to explore the sustainability of this dichotomy only as a lens to elucidate the internal tensions of Nietzsche's ideas on artistic representation.

2.3. The Pervasiveness of Metonymy

Rather than taking account of Jakobson's later expositions of his bipolar scheme,[32] we would like to explore the refinements that his earlier article already provides, since here there is already at play an uncontrolled erasure of binary oppositions that clears the way towards an understanding of Nietzsche's aesthetic views as well as their enactment in Modernist narrative and poetry. Within Jakobson's article, as well as within Nietzsche's account of rhetoric, there seems to operate not so much a privileging of metaphor as a grounding of

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[31] Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 117.

[32] See Roman Jakobson's later essay, 'The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles'.

metaphor on metonymy, as if the contagious nature of contiguity were heard in the background, claiming its primordial status. Let us explore Jakobson's article first.

In order to preserve the centrality of the structuralist division between paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations, two phenomena appear marginalised: patterned speech in the form of phrases and in the form of rhythmic and rhyming sequences. To acknowledge the importance of these two phenomena in speech production would have been to assign too pervasive a role to the function of contexture, thus weakening the structuralist emphasis on some oppositions that, in their over-simplification, open the door for the formalisation of the rules of speech production. (Let us remember that formal language has been one of the banners of Structuralism.) However, focusing on these two marginal phenomena, as two modes of formulaic expression, it is not difficult to see that contexture may be assigned a greater importance in the characterisation of sign production, not because of the *frequency* of these utterances but because of their privileged *status* among utterances.

Jakobson initially characterises combination, based on relations of contiguity, as the kind of relation that pertains to the phonological level, where no free choice is possible, and where the elements of the phonological chain that constitute the word are governed by a context.[33] Yet we can now say that this

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[33] i.e., the phonemes that correspond to a word, such as 'aesthetic', cannot have their position in the sequence altered, and each one must contiguously remain *next to* the preceding and

kind of relation also operates at a higher level, in the case of coined phrases whose structure cannot be altered. This proves that there are cases in which contiguity relations (those within the syntagmatic sequence) retain the fixity of the phonological chain, and cannot be fully reconciled with similarity (i.e. paradigmatic) relations: phrases are not a sequence of exchangeable items, and therefore resist formalisation according to syntactic rules (where the variables stand for possibilities of paradigmatic substitution).

This stock of ready-made combinations also involves a threat to the distinction between situational context and context of utterance (i.e., the context constituted by the events surrounding the act of speech and the context provided by the other linguistic items in the utterance, which are not the phrase in question), since it provides the basis for the relying on relations of contiguity that occur *in speech* rather than in reality: a keel is to be found physically next to the body of the ship, and therefore is a valid metonymic term, but Jakobson also takes as metonymic operation that which relies on a purely linguistic contiguity:

> such metonymies may be characterised as projections from the line of a habitual context into the line of substitution and selection: a <u>sign</u> (*fork*) which usually occurs with another <u>sign</u> (*knife*) may be used instead of this sign.[34]

This emphasis on contexture undermines some of the basic tenets of the article,

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succeeding one.

[34] Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language', p. 125. My underlining.

and its disruption is even furthered by the existence of another mode of syntagmatic production: that which is based on the adjustment to phonological and stress patterns: rhyme and rhythm.

The first objection to rise against this last inclusion is that rhyme and rhythm play an even lesser role in everyday speech than formulaic phrases, and that they belong to a highly elaborate form of speech production: poetry. Yet there is an extent to which the same process at work in poetic composition may be said to govern the relations within linguistic axes. This would involve extending the fixed *combinatory* structure (which Jakobson confined to phonological sequences resulting in words) to the formation of syntagmatic sequences: the occurrence of phonemes and stresses would depend on the structure of the sequence and would determine the choice of words, as if now the sentence or the utterance were an 'extended word', complying with something analogous to phonological combinatory rules of word formation. It is in this sense that we can conceive of rhyme and rhythm as operating by relations of contiguity and contexture, governed by the exigencies of the phonological context. This seems to us the primary way in which rhyme and rhythm can be understood according to Jakobson's scheme, and only secondarily in terms of devices relying on similarity.[35]

However, even if we accept this account as that of one of the procedures within poetic composition, can this still offer any light on the process of

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[35] The article provides, however, some support for this second interpretation.

language production at large? Jakobson is willing to accept, despite his definition of the paradigm in terms of similarity relations, that there are *semantic* relations of contiguity within the paradigm:[36] yet this contiguity does not seem to be associable with the continuity which rhyme and rhythm put forward, and which we have aligned with Jakobson's intra-word phonological relationships. But if we observe the series of items that Jakobson produces as examples of paradigmatic semantic contiguity, we see that there is an internal link with *phonological recurrence*. Paradigmatic axes are not only formed by words that can share syntactic functions, or in general words that can appear in a given position in the utterance substituting each other (here we would say that in this case items are related through semantic similarity, including total semantic difference as well): paradigmatic axes also include grammatical paradigms and lexical paradigms, and these are, according to Jakobson, paradigms governed by semantic contiguity:

> a paradigm (in particular a set of grammatical cases such as *he-his-him* or of tenses such as *he votes-he voted*) present the same semantic content from different points of view associated with each other by contiguity. [...] Also, as a rule, words derived from the same root, such

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[36] See Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language', p. 127. Jakobson takes semantic contiguity (contiguity of meaning) to be the relation between words, in terms of meaning, by virtue of a conceptual proximity (not spatial or actual) which is not reducible to differences or similarities. For instance, the metonymy 'keel' for 'vessel' would not be a case of semantic contiguity, whereas 'vote' for 'voter' (action for agent) would.

as *grant-grantor-grantee*, are semantically related by contiguity.[37]

It is easy to note that in these series semantic contiguity is paralleled by a repetition of phonemes, and since this repetition does not seem to be accidental, we are inclined to think that there is an internal relationship between the recurrence of phonemes and the contiguity of meanings in these paradigms: if phonological recurrence is understood under the terms of formal contiguity of poetic devices outlined above, then it would appear that there is a point at which the distinction between formal and semantic contiguity dissolves, and the creation of new meanings within the paradigm would bear an intrinsic relationship to the production of poetic utterances. Under this view, notions such as process and result or quality and substratum would not only be primarily linguistic rather than philosophical notions: they would also have their origin in language's own poetic drive, in the formal contiguity of signs prior to their signification.

Jakobson had already suggested the possibility of a purely formal aspect of contiguity relations within the paradigm. Against the definition of contexture only in relation to the speech chain, sustained by Saussure, he says that

> selection (and, correspondingly, substitution) deals with entities conjoined in the code but not in the given message, whereas, in the case of combination, the entities are conjoined <u>in both</u> or only in the actual

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[37] Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language', p. 127.

message.[38]

And if we allow for purely formal relations in the paradigm, an understanding of rhyme and rhythm in terms of similarity becomes secondary, since it does not account for the point at which form merges with meaning.

The need to base formal paradigmatic relations upon a contiguity structure, despite their seeming play with differences and identities, makes us wonder whether formal similarity is not itself a contradiction in terms within sign-systems: whereas semantic *similarity* comes closer to the structure of mirroring, with the positing of an original absolute or archetype in the synonymic relation (an *identity* of meaning is postulated), formal similarity escapes this pattern and tolerates, at most, the kind of similarity at work in family resemblances, where there is no possible reference to an archetype. Even the phenomena of tautology and homonymy are no good counter-examples, since tautology belongs to the realm of metalanguage and homonymy (the occurrence of a different word identical in form) can only be accounted for as a syntagmatic phenomenon, not one within the paradigm. If the mirror structure does not fully apply to semiotic systems,[39] it seems that it is primarily thanks to the pervasiveness of contiguity relations, which preclude the unbridgeable split between the object and its mirror image. The contagious nature of this

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[38] Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language', p. 119. My underlining.

[39] See Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, chapter 7. for arguments defending the non-signical nature of mirror images.

pervasiveness was already noted by Nietzsche:

> rhythm and rhyme thereby become partly an adhesive for our attention, since we follow the reading more willingly, and partly they give rise to a blind agreement with what is read, prior to all judgement [...]. The more excitable and natural a person is, the more rhythm acts upon him as a *compulsion* to repeat the rhythm and produces that 'blind attunement prior to all judgement'; this compulsion is usually associated with pleasure, but it can tear at souls and overpower them so suddenly that it is more like a painful paroxysm.[40]

This is a first glimpse at the primordial force of contiguity as opposed to similarity, to which Jakobson's text itself seems to bend inadvertedly conceding that the processes at work in poetic rhythm and rhyme are constitutive of language at large. We shall now see how this recognition is also behind Nietzsche's emphasis on metaphor.

2.4. The Mimetic Character of Metaphor

The ascription of a cognitive status to metaphor, according to Eco, goes back to Aristotle:

> Aristotle provides the most luminous confirmation of the metaphor's cognitive function when he associates it with *mimesis* [...]. In the *Rhetoric* (1411b 25*ff*) there is no room for doubt: the best metaphors are

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[40] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Rhythm', in Gilman et al., p. 244.

> those that 'show things in a state of activity'. Thus metaphorical knowledge is knowledge of the dynamics of the real.[41]

And we will find this paradoxical combination of irreconcilable elements in Nietzsche's account of our metaphorical approach to reality: metaphor is mimesis, but it also rests on a dynamicity that exceeds the stable pattern of the mirroring. However, there is an important difference with Aristotle; for Nietzsche metaphorical activity, as an artistic, rhetorical activity, is in some sense prior to concept formation:

> Nietzsche brings about a highly symptomatic reversal in the relationship which he establishes between metaphor and concept: metaphor is no longer referred to the concept, as in the metaphysical tradition inherited from Aristotle, but rather the concept is referred to metaphor.[42]

Yet what takes place with Nietzsche is not simply a reversal which leaves the structure untouched, metaphor simply exchanging places with the stability of conceptual meanings: rather than a reversal, a displacement occurs, with a subsequent redefinition of boundaries:

> 'carrying over' [μεταφερειν] must not be understood here as a transition from one place to another: it must itself be taken as a

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[41] Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 102.

[42] Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, pp. 14-15.

> metaphor which, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, condenses several meanings: transfiguration, transformation, ecstasy, self-dispossession and metamorphosis (which is possible only if the distinction into well-demarcated genera and species is erased).[43]

This already points to the fact that the duality of metaphorical structure is going to be undermined in Nietzsche's hands. However, most of Nietzsche's approaches to the analysis of metaphorical structures seem to preserve this dualism; if words are the result of a metaphorical operation, they are still removed from the 'original realm': 'we possess nothing but metaphors for things — metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities'.[44] It seems as if the dualism which has conditioned the Western understanding of language (and which Saussure formulated as the signifier-signified dichotomy) continues to be at work here. Whether in the form of an intra-linguistic pair or as the opposition of world to language (and the young Nietzsche chooses this second option), this fundamental split appears as the definitory condition of language itself, and given language's metaphorical essence, as the *first* metaphor.[45]

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[43] Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, p. 15. My addition.

[44] Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense', in Breazeale, p. 83.

[45] On Nietzsche's engagement with the erasing of the binary and oppositional nature of language, see Alan D. Schrift, 'Nietzsche and the Critique of Oppositional Thinking', in *History of European Ideas*, Vol. II, 1989, p. 785. On metaphor as inscribed in the text of metaphysics, and Nietzsche's attack on the metaphoric quality of truth, see Rey, 'Commentary', in Michael Allen Gillespie and Tracy B. Strong (eds.), *Nietzsche's New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy,*

What linguistic dualism institutes is not only the legitimacy of language for mimetic knowledge, but also the very possibility of metaphysical thought, since the split between transcendence and immediacy will then be thought according to this initial metaphor: very easily the 'proper' of a metaphorical expression becomes the 'otherworldly'. It can be objected that since metaphor is based on similarity, there is no unbridgeable split here,[46] that we could even talk of shared properties, or of some kind of dependence. Yet in the context of an opposition with contiguity, similarity (as the other side of contrast) involves a split into two heterogeneous realms which can never be fully reconciled: similarity becomes synonymous with heterogeneity, with essential discontinuity and contrast. Nietzsche seems to have grasped this when he talks of image production:

> imaginative production may be observed in the eye. Similarity leads to the boldest further development. But so do entirely different relationships: contrasts lead unceasingly to contrasts. Here one can *see*

Aesthetics and Politics (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[46] In a somewhat different context, Tracy Strong argues that 'what the metaphor bridges is not two worlds, but the making of sense and the sense that appears as made [...]. For Nietzsche human beings are architects of meaning [...]; making sense of the world, the very epistemology of authority, itself rests on this aesthetic conception of the world'. (Strong, 'Aesthetic Authority and Tradition', p. 996.) However, as I hope to have made clear by now, there is more to aesthetics than a liberating power or a recovery of a lost authority, and there is more to metaphor as a 'surplus of meaning' (Kristeva's expression): there is also metaphor as the *precondition* of the text of metaphysics.

> the extraordinary productivity of the intellect. It is a life in images.[47]

These thoughts seem to put forward the idea of the continuity between similarity and contrast *as* an interplay of differences (then implying separation) which is in turn associated with the creation of *images*, and with vision and the intellect: that is, with the mimetic structure of reflection which is the precondition of the unbridgeable metaphysical split. Nietzsche is also aware of the link between metaphorical activity and the philosophical strife for control:

> in the philosopher, activities are carried out by means of metaphor. The striving for *uniform* control. Each thing gravitates towards a condition of immeasurability. In nature, the character of the individual is seldom something fixed; instead, it is always expanding.[48]

The contrast between expansion and the uniformity of metaphorical activity corroborates the connection between the initial metaphor which language constitutes and the history of actions of metaphysical thought upon nature: language as metaphor is the basis of a tradition of thought that ends up in a discourse of mastery of natural excess.

Yet Nietzsche provides us with the key for a view of language that, although it acknowledges the metaphorical character of language, it also

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[47] Nietzsche, 'The Philosopher', in Breazeale, p. 23, paragraph 62.

[48] Nietzsche, 'The Philosopher', in Breazeale, p. 34, paragraph 90.

incorporates elements which cannot simply rest on this dualistic structure. Against the pictorial nature of language, its metaphorical drive, its core structure of mirroring, Nietzsche places the fluidity of music:

> *music as a supplement to language*: many stimuli and entire states of stimulation which cannot be expressed in language can be rendered in music.[49]

But then, is music not a fundamental constituent of language itself? Is not the formal contiguity in the manner of recurrent patterns of sounds (rhythm and rhyme), outlined in the previous section, essentially musical in nature?

We could say that only on the basis of this contiguity can language escape the shackles of metaphorical structure and enjoy the qualities that Nietzsche ascribes to music here. It is also clear that, although constitutive of language itself, this formal contiguity, this metonymic drive, is more explicit in poetic language, where meaning relationships are ultimately governed by formal contiguities. Poetry is the paradigmatic example of the displacement and dissolution of the distinction between the formal and semantic aspects of speech units, and in this sense it subverts the very basic dualism of a language understood in metaphorical terms: it establishes a contiguity between signifier and signified which is ultimately a counterpart to the metaphysical possibilities of language.

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[49] Nietzsche, 'The Philosopher', in Breazeale, p. 40, paragraph 111.

In his description of the metaphorical nature of language, Nietzsche cannot but acknowledge the essentially *artistic* nature of metaphorical transference, and this leads him to suggest a subordination of transference to the fluidity of the grounds for its possibility. Here we have an analogue to the structure of dependence which the Dionysiac and the Apolline forces constitute: it is as a primordial basis that the realm of Dionysiac contagion must be understood, but in constant tension with the artistic delimitations of the Apolline realm. As long as the Apolline setting of boundaries is understood as an artistic activity, its essential link with Dionysiac formlessness remains secured. Thus, in emphasising the artistic, poetic traits of language formation, he is forced to make metaphor depend on an original text of contiguity. Conceptual architecture rests on fluidity:

> here one may certainly admire man as a mighty genius of construction, who succeeds in piling up an infinitely complicated dome of concepts upon an unstable foundation, and, as it were, on running water.[50]

The primordial character of a lack of discontinuity is highlighted always together with an emphasis on the artistic character of language formation, as if an artistic exercise of language and the acknowledgement of primal contiguity would necessarily have to go hand in hand.[51] Individual perceptions give rise to

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[50] Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense', p. 85.

[51] This basing of metaphor on metonymy refutes a simplistic reading of Nietzsche's

images, which are their *metaphors*; yet for the formation of concepts the metaphorical character of these images must be forgotten: he who creates concepts 'forgets that the original perceptual metaphors are metaphors and takes them to be the things themselves'.[52] What is the nature of this forgetting? Is it the active forgetting condition of the splendour of life in Nietzsche´s later writings? or the life-affirming attitude against the historicist deadening? In this contrast, the activity of forgetting is only secondarily a life-enhancing one: only to the extent to which it distances us from the lethal whirlpool of the Dionysiac absolute lack of difference.[53] Here forgetting is primarily the diseased form of

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understanding of the essence of language: the deceptive character of language as metaphorical has the same positive value as any other deception through art, and the metonymic fluidity on which the artistic (metaphorical) character of language is based guarantees a way out of *mere* deception. It is not sufficient to say, contrasting Nietzsche's views with Wagner's early aesthetic ideas: 'In Wagner's system, the word has a metonymic relationship to the referent. According to Nietzsche, language is mere metaphor that has no relation to things. Language is never an adequate expression of reality' (Mary A. Cicora, 'From Metonymy to Metaphor: Wagner and Nietzsche on Language', in *German Life and Letters* 42:1, October 1988, p. 27). Language being an inadequate (metaphorical) expression of reality, it has all the import of the artistic process of representation, and ultimately bears an essential relationship to the fluid non-difference to which metonymy testifies.

[52] Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense', p. 86.

[53] In this respect, Alison Ainley seconds Kristeva's view of metaphor as a 'surplus of meaning' gesturing towards formlessness, but she also acknowledges, with the help of Nietzsche, the dangers of the lack of difference, in this case gender difference. See Alison Ainley, '"Ideal Selfishness": Nietzsche's Metaphor of Maternity', in *Exceedingly Nietzsche*

* , pp. 126-127. Equally , Eric Blondel points to

the Apolline drive, the turning of art into theory (exemplified paradigmatically by Socrates) and therefore the break of the original tension, artistic in nature, between limit-setting and abandonment. In the case of the building of metaphor upon metaphor, the problem is not so much to indulge in a further operation of transference as to forget the essentially artistic quality of these transferences; to forget the poetic nature of a *primitive* world of metaphor on which similarities depend on contiguity:

> only by forgetting this primitive world of metaphor can one live with any repose, security and consistency: only by means of the petrification and coagulation of a mass of images which originally streamed from the primal faculty of human imagination like fiery liquid, only in the invincible faith that *this* sun, *this* window, *this* table is a truth in itself, in short, only by forgetting that he himself is an *artistically creating* subject, does man live with any repose, security and consistency. If but for an instant he could escape from the prison walls of this faith, his 'self-consciousness' would be immediately destroyed.[54]

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the dangers of a metaphoric world acknowledged as such, the world of art, which contrary to what he seems to suggest elsewhere, does not enjoy the healing power of forgetting which corresponds to the theoretical-Socratic attitude: 'Indeed if man were aware of living in an originally and fundamentally metaphorical world, he would succumb to Dionysian madness. And Dionysian truth is mortal' (Eric Blondel, 'Nietzsche: Life as Metaphor', in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, de. by David B. Alison (London: MIT Press, 1985), p. 172. Here Dionysiac truth is, of course, essentially opposed to truth arrived at by the exercise of theory.

[54] Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense', p. 86. My underlining. The need for the ritual destruction of the self in order to reach the sacred ground of continuity is examined in the

Nietzsche's own emphasis is on artistic creation, thus legitimising a privileged status for the poetic drive within language formation, underlying the very structural metaphor that constitutes language as duality. When this duality ceases to be referred to its artistic origin, it falls into the pattern of a mirroring, of a mimetic reflection. It is in this sense that Aristotle was able to assign a cognitive value to metaphor, and it is also in this idea that Nietzsche assimilates knowledge (in the traditional, unrefined sense, which will be modified in his later writings) to the metaphorical structure of imitation:

> *imitation* is the opposite of *knowing* to the extent that knowing certainly does not want to admit any transference, but wishes instead to cling to the impression without metaphor and apart from the consequences. [...] But there is no 'real' expression and *no real knowing apart from metaphor*. [...] *Knowing* is nothing but working with the favourite metaphors, an imitating which is no longer felt to be an imitation.[55]

Comparison, elucidation of similarities and copying involve the metaphorical/metaphysical split into two realms which is inherent to a structure of knowledge; the positing of the stability of an original is a precondition of thinking:

> *imitation* is a means employed by all culture. By this means instinct is

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next chapter.

[55] Nietzsche, 'The Philosopher', in Breazeale, pp. 50-51, paragraph 149. My underlining.

gradually produced. *All comparison* (*primal thinking*) *is imitation.*[56]

However, the aesthetic import of the mimetic structure (or the poetic import of the metaphorical split) cannot be fully comprehended by a dualistic structure of knowledge: whenever the aesthetic is at play, dualism relies on a former contiguity that the pursuit of knowledge only partially veils. The line of division, the mirror itself: shows its problematic status:

> man has evolved slowly, and knowledge is still evolving: his picture of the world thus becomes ever more true and complete. Naturally, it is only a clearer and clearer *mirroring*. But the mirror itself is nothing entirely foreign and apart from the nature of things. On the contrary, it too slowly arose as [part of] the nature of things.[57]

There is here a new concession to a contiguity older than mirroring, to the artistic contagion that even the sober activity of knowledge cannot erase from its origin. In the context of art, the ambiguous status of the mirror, itself a dividing line and part of the realm which it delimits, becomes analogous to the ambiguous status of the eye, itself seeing but susceptible of being seen: form is ultimately dependent upon the natural continuum to which this eye belongs:

> there is no *form* in nature, because there is no inner and no outer. All art

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[56] Nietzsche, 'The Philosopher', in Breazeale, p. 49, paragraph 146.

[57] Nietzsche, 'The Philosopher', in Breazeale, pp. 37-38, paragraph 102. Translator's addition.

> depends upon the *mirror* of the eyes.[58]

In order to be able to think this paradoxical contiguity, we can only employ a metonymic structure, modelled on the corresponding rhetorical transference. Within this metonymic pattern, contiguity involves a non-identity which is not reducible to the interplay of differences, and a non-difference which is not the same as identity. The pervasiveness of this fluid relation reaches, according to Nietzsche, the very core of synthetic judgement and concept formation, undermining knowledge's strife for objectivity:

> a synthetic judgement describes a thing according to its consequences, i.e. *essence* and *consequences* become *identified*, i.e. a *metonymy*. Thus a *metonymy* lies at the essence of synthetic judgement' that is to say that it is a *false equation*.[59]

And further below:

> abstractions are metonymies, i.e., substitutions of cause and effect. But every concept is a metonymy, and knowing takes place in concepts.[60]

These views are aimed to undermine the claims of the superiority of knowledge

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[58] Nietzsche, 'The Philosopher', in Breazeale, p. 40, paragraph 112.

[59] Nietzsche, 'The Philosopher', in Breazeale, p. 52, paragraph 152.

[60] Nietzsche, 'The Philosopher', in Breazeale, p. 58, paragraph 11.

over art, but they can be equally be seen as a levelling of discourses in order to subject them to an analysis in terms of modes of representation. Thus, going in the opposite direction, we can also see how the metaphorical mode of representation constitutes *per se*, whenever detached from an artistic context or forgotten its poetic nature, a tendency towards the objectivity of knowledge.

Illustrations of this are offered by Jakobson's rendering of some of the effects of what he terms the 'contiguity and similarity disorders', that is, extreme cases of aphasia or language disturbance in which the speakers are pathologically driven towards the metaphoric and metonymic poles of language. In the exacerbation of metonymic tendencies, the 'similarity disorder', a loss of the metalinguistic function occurs: the capacity to 'name', to speak *about* language, disappears; 'the aphasic defect in the "capacity of naming" is properly a loss of metalanguage'.[61] We may begin to wonder, at this point, whether this is not consistent with an interpretation of the series metaphor-metalanguage-metaphysics as revolving around a common core. Symptomatically, the loss of metalanguage has as one of its aspects an extreme conception of language in which two signs are never identical: 'for such patients two occurrences of the same word in two different contexts are mere homonyms'.[62] Is this not the expression of an archaic view of language for which metaphorical dualism has not yet taken place, and for which each utterance is a singular event, belonging

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[61] Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language', p. 124.

[62] Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language', p. 122.

to the unfolding of reality as events, and not mirroring its essence in the fixity of meaning? Within this view would fall some archaic poetic devices such as the *kenningar*, according to which the occurrence of the object in different contexts is paralleled by a corresponding shifting in expression: the dynamicity of events and that of language run together.

At the other end of the spectrum, the exacerbation of the metaphoric tendency, or the 'contiguity disorder', the most prominent effect is the turning of language into a mere system of binary oppositions:

> the aphasic deficient in contexture exhibits a tendency to abolish the hierarchy of linguistic units and to reduce their scale to a simple level. The last level to remain is either a class of significative values, the word, [...] or a class of distinctive values, the phoneme.[63]

In either case the units are not integrated in a context, and only preserve 'a purely distinctive function'. It is not difficult to see in this picture a portrait of the workings of formal or artificial languages, based on principles of binary opposition, and in which all influence of the context has been erased. Again, it is only consistent that this kind of expression, here presented as a pathological development of the metaphorical tendency, has been the language of the scientific discourses directly developed out of our metaphysical tradition.

Thus, since all enquiry owes its legitimacy to the initial metaphorical

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[63] Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language', p. 128.

split, understood as mimesis, reflections on the nature of representation are doomed to be partial, to take sides with metaphor, since they themselves are *reflections* within a mimetic structure from which the relation of contiguity is excluded:

> similarity in meaning connects the symbols of a metalanguage with the symbols of the language referred to. Similarity connects a metaphoric term with the term for which it is substituted. Consequently, when constructing a metalanguage to interpret tropes, the researcher possesses more homogeneous means to handle metaphor, whereas metonymy, based on a different principle, easily defies interpretation.[64]

Here we see how the object of study, in its constituting the hidden structure of the very investigation, yields itself to theory in a way that another object (metonymy) could not:

> not only the tool of the observer, but also the object of observation are responsible for the preponderance of metaphor over metonymy in scholarship.[65]

And it is the elusive character of metonymy, its resistance to theory, that foregrounds Nietzsche's metaphorical activity, even though a primordial contiguity cannot but be suggested in his early writings as the artistic sanction of

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[64] Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language', p. 132.

[65] Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language', p. 132.

metaphor.

2.5. The Sacred Character of Poetic Contiguity

After having manipulated and displaced Jakobson's dichotomies, under the light of Nietzsche's own understanding of the polarity between metaphor and metonymy, we can now revise the theory of genres that aligns narrative with the contiguity of metonymy and poetry with the similarity of metaphor. It is undeniable that the sequence of actions that characterises narrative prose is basically forwarded by semantic contiguity, by the actual proximity of units of meaning; equally, poetry is essentially linked to a deviation from the proper which allows for profuse metaphorical activity. Nevertheless, this distinction, which has exerted a great influence after Jakobson, does not take into account a different sense in which the relations of contiguity and similarity modelled on rhetorical tropes can be associated with narrative and poetry. According to this different sense, which we have tried to unfold, literary language at large is characterised by the kind of contiguity that reaches beyond the separation between the formal and semantic levels, and suspends the essentially metaphorical character of objective language. There would be only a difference of degree between the narrative and poetic genres in this respect, and it would be precisely in poetry that the explicitness of the primacy of this kind of far-reaching contiguity would be greater.

Poetry being closer to formulaic, sacred speech, it allows for the conception of utterance as event, as an intervention in the order of things by

virtue of its belonging, contiguously, to that order. Formal repetitions, sound and stress patterns, emphasise the unitary character of poetic discourse, its erasing of the mimetic duality. Even the adoption of the Jakobsonian scheme cannot but acknowledge that the poetic qualities of Modernist prose, shown in this prose's favouring of formal interplay, are linked to a metonymic drive. Talking of Gertrude Stein, David Lodge writes:

> her use of repetition with slight variation in her earlier, metonymic prose has the effect of converting the dynamic into the static, the temporal into the spatial; this is entirely consistent with the aim of metaphor-oriented Symbolist and Imagist verse [...] .[66]

Therefore, if it is in poetry that utterances can be loaded with the sacred immanence that precedes dualism, it is not because of the abundance of metaphors, but because of the underlying contiguity thanks to which words interact with each other as if in a context of objects, meaning relationships not being independent of formal interplay.

This commitment to a primordial world of fluid contiguity, captured in pre-modern, analogic views of language and the world, is not an exclusive prerogative of poetry, even though its nature becomes clearer understood on the model of metonymy as a poetic device. Just as Nietzsche's metaphors are a compromise with fluidity, the structure of aesthetic mimesis does not need to renounce a tribute to contiguity. In fact, a truly artistic dimension arises when

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[66] Lodge, 'The Language of Modernist Fiction', p. 489.

we see the products of the visual arts not as a metaphor of reality (a recreation of the experience of vision as a confrontation with reality), but as contiguous with the reality that constitutes their original, their 'proper'. The contiguity between a painting and the non-artistic objects of our vision allows us to regard the painting itself as object, as *part* of reality, and its production itself as the experience of vision; conversely, vision is no longer an innocent seeing, and becomes entangled with the processes of artistic creation. In this mode, *theory* continues to be the discourse of metaphorical/metaphysical *seeing*, but can no longer disavow itself from the contiguity of the poetic discourse that precedes it.

3. Sacrifice: The Aesthetic Rendering of Sacredness

Nietzsche points in *The Birth of Tragedy* to the mythic essence of ancient tragic drama, thus revealing the religious origins of tragedy, and by extension the original link between sacredness and art, since all artistic expression is measured for Nietzsche in relation to a pattern that he finds in ancient Greek tragedy. What Greek tragedy also allows is a voyage in a somehow different direction, for through an analysis of tragic drama we can also grasp the sacrificial origins of the myths there contained. From this standpoint, tragedy reveals not so much its links with the system of myths of an established religion, as the mechanisms of its constitution from a set of original ritual activities. An analysis of Greek tragedy in this direction has been carried out by René Girard, for whom ritual has pre-eminence over myth in the process of a religion being constituted:

> the more recent theory reverses the [older] procedure, attributing to ritual not only the origin of myth, but also the origin of the gods, and — in Greece — of tragedy and other cultural forms as well.[1]

This means that ritualistic practices are not expressive of a set of beliefs or a mythical discourse, but precede them in the theoretical order as more primordial experiences. We are not concerned here with the sequential order of events as they actually happened; rather, we are concerned with a theoretical sequence to

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[1] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. P. Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkings University Press, 1977), p. 89.

which events and their interpretations are not indifferent, yet for which we can claim a certain autonomy and even a priority. That is to say, for us, the actuality of the chain of historical happenings is not completely dissociated from, but is yet secondary in respect to, the theoretical articulation of its concepts. For an account of the structure of sacrifice to be consistent, we must conceive of rituals as prior to discoursive ordering, and of this discoursive ordering itself as needed for the structuring of mythic beliefs. Therefore, in thinking of a founding ritual we are thinking of activities for which no reason is provided and which respond to no behavioural code, since they are precisely what constitutes the possibility of the arising of reasons, beliefs and codes. If rituals are defined in contrast with their correspondent set of beliefs, they must logically preceed them; whether this was actually the case or not is not relevant here, although, for rituals to maintain their status as practices, it *is* relevant that the question of their historical place in a sequence can remain open.

Among all the ancient ritual practices, the ritual of sacrifice seems to have had paramount importance, and to its structure are reducible many other ritualistic acts whose appearance would not initially allow us to include them in this category. The centrality of sacrifice becomes clear when its structure has been shown to lie at the basis of the very possibility of mythic discourse and to constitute the ground for any structure of objectification. In this respect, sacrifice is analogous to the grounding power of the unstable tension between the Nietzschean Apolline and Dionysiac forces.

3.1. Sacredness and Sacrifice

In its original ritual form sacrifice appears as the ceremonial killing of a victim (animal or human) or the ceremonial consumption of some good, according to fixed procedures and within a religious structure. The act of killing is not the distinctive trait of sacrifice, according to G. Bataille: what is ultimately important in sacrifice is the passage from one order of experience to another:

> to sacrifice is not to kill but to relinquish and to give. Killing is only the exhibition of a deep meaning. What is important is to pass from a lasting order, in which all consumption of resources is subordinated to the need for duration, to the violence of an unconditional consumption [...].[2]

From consumption subordinated to duration we move to consumption for its own sake: these two modes of engagement with resources correlate to the temporality of survival (the lasting order, where change is at the service of the preservation of identity or personality) and the temporality of sacredness (the order whose identity *is* change, in which each change does not alter identity but enhances it by showing its constitutive force and dynamicity). The negative character of consumption disappears when there is no purpose or hidden intention to recuperate what is lost: dynamicity is freed from its ties of

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[2] Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989), p. 49.

subordination to the temporary perpetuation of contingency, and reaches the higher status of the pure affirmation of contingency itself as eternal change. The realm of unconditioned, non-subordinated reality, of irrecuperable loss, is made accessible through the act of sacrifice. This unconditional realm is the realm of the sacred, with which we communicate through a ritual negation of what opposes it: contingency and duration. The experience of sacredness is thus necessarily linked to a form of denial of our everyday existence, of our 'profane' duration:

> [...] what is sacred attracts and possesses an incomparable value, but at the same time it appears vertiginously dangerous for that clear and profane world where mankind situates its privileged domain.[3]

In this opposition between the profane everyday and sacred value, the dangerous value of the sacred world resides in its foreignness to what is properly human; to the discrete temporality of the human being the sacred appears as a dreadful force whose pattern is not ordered production but irrecuperable excess. At the same time, this force is not perceived as simply alien to what is human, but as *more* than human, as the primary occurrence of some unmeasurable dark power that is felt to be present *within* humans themselves, and yet pointing to their destruction. For this reason the 'unconditional consumption' of the sacred is sensed both as incomparably valuable and unbearably violent:

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[3] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 36.

> the sacred is that prodigious effervescence of life that, for the sake of duration, the order of things holds in check, and that this holding changes into a breaking loose, that is, into violence.[4]

Violent behaviour is what most clearly displaces man from an ordered existence and leads him back to the continuity of the natural world, where the forces of nature are always in excess of themselves and where the animal lives in intimacy with its aliments and its victims. In violence human beings recall their analogy with the unmasterable, with boundless excess and with continuity (with the traits of a sacred world):

> the sacred consists of all those forces whose dominance over man increases or seems to increase in proportion to man's effort to master them. Tempests, forest fires, and plagues, among other phenomena, may be classified as sacred. Far outranking these, however, though in a far less obvious manner, stands human violence [...]. Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred.[5]

Therefore, violence is offered by René Girard and Georges Bataille as the link between the sacred realm and the violent institution of sacrifice. Because the sacred realm is characterised by the traits of violence (purposeless destruction, absence of boundaries, excessive energy), a violent ritual comes into intimacy with sacredness; but also, because violence can be ritualised, the dangerous and

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[4] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 52.

[5] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 31.

dreadful element of what is sacred (of violence itself) can be held in check. At this point it is useful to use a distinction that Girard makes between reciprocal or unrestrained violence (the boundless violence that destroys) and sacrificial violence (the ritual violence that allows room for civilisation). In fact, Girard's argument constantly revolves around the notion of ritual violence as the founder of both religion and civilised society. The institution of sacrifice appears from this perspective not as a disclosure of sacredness (as a device to come to intimacy with the divinity) but as a mechanism that itself *creates* the sacred through a performance, as indeed etymological resonances suggest: to sacrifice (*sacer facere*, to make sacred) is not an unveiling but a creative action. From this viewpoint, the logic of the constitution of sacredness would need the ritual restraints in order for the sacred to appear as such.

In relation to the institution of sacrifice, as both its generator and its attempted mechanism of control, sacredness reveals itself in the form of unconditional expenditure, unmasterable force and dangerous violence. A fourth aspect may be added, already implied in its violent character and its relation to the unmasterable forces of nature: this aspect is the continuity and intimacy that the sacred requires and that restores us to the continuity of the animal state. For Bataille 'the animal world is that of immanence and immediacy, for that world, which is closed to us, is so to the extent that we cannot discern in it an ability to transcend itself'.[6] The immanence and

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[6] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 56.

continuity of a realm prior to any scissure (in which, in our eyes, the animal is in a relation of intimacy with everything) are the characteristic traits of a world pervaded by sacredness. Similarly Nietzsche, in the second of his *Untimely Meditations*, opposes the immediate life-affirming essence of animality to the historicity of the human being:

> [...] the animal lives *unhistorically*, for it is contained in the present, like a number without any awkward fraction left over; it does not know how to dissimulate, it conceals nothing and at every instant appears wholly as what it is.[7]

Both for Bataille and Nietzsche, the human perception of animality reveals the original continuity and lack of mediation of a world from which we feel removed. To this world, the realm of immanent sacredness, we are restored by the mechanism of sacrifice; but sacrifice itself, with all its founding power, cannot but be intertwined with aesthetic mechanisms which threaten its pure belonging to the realm of sacredness.

3.2. Sacrifice and the Aesthetic

A sacrifice requires such a number of representational devices that it can be said to be an aesthetic as much as a religious act. Sacrifice is necessarily linked to

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[7] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 61.

theatricality: it is a public ceremony that combines display and participation; while its visual display and theatrical character allow a distance, the tacit assumption of a meaning that matters to all the members of the community prevents detachment.

Regarding the mechanisms of the genesis of sacrifice, the victim is chosen, according to Girard, through a double process of substitution, the first resulting in an *illusion*, and the second as an operation of *mimesis*, imitation. The first process involves substituting a single member of the community for the whole: this individual, the surrogate victim, takes upon itself the ills and sins of the whole community; this mechanism is taken to be 'not simply [...] an illusion and a mystification, but [...] the most formidable and influential illusion and mystification in the whole range of human experience'.[8] An example of an individual of this kind is the mythical figure of King Oedipus. The second substitution is that of a victim outside the community for the surrogate victim. In this operation the mimetic nature of sacrifice is at work: the sacrificial victim has to belong to a completely different category in order for a community to unite unanimously against it, but this sacrificial victim also has to bear some resemblance to the original surrogate victim, which was itself a member of the community.

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[8] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 82.

René Girard explains this double substitution as an isolation of violence in the first instance and a subsequent satisfaction of the community's violent impulses, in order for the community to survive as such. But what interests us is not so much the anthropological explanation for these substitutions as their characterisation as illusory and mimetic. First, the illusory isolation of an impulse that otherwise remains contagious and undifferentiated marks the designation of a surrogate victim. The fact that these boundaries are illusory and opposed to an unbearable boundlessness assimilates this procedure to the Apolline creation of arbitrary boundaries that Nietzsche describes in *The Birth of Tragedy*. This Apolline tendency is precisely characterised there as a desire for clarity and individuation, escaping from formless reality to a delight in perfect forms.

Secondly, the *mimesis* of the sacrificial substitution (the substitution of the sacrificial victim for the surrogate victim) can be seen as the originary presupposition of a boundary between two orders of reality: between the boundlessness of community violence and the foreignness of external objects. This original split allows for a mimetic structure of resemblances and correspondences between two essentially different orders of reality: an anthropological explanation suggests that this split is conditioned by the community's need to unite *unanimously* against the victim; this unanimity is also not based on a moral code, but on a raw perception of differences; thus the victim has been sensed as essentially foreign but yet not totally unrelated to what is truly being expiated (to the sacrificer's own violent impulse), since the

foreigness is not great enough to preclude the exertion of violence. In the case of the sacrifice of an object (the case of an offering or a ritual expenditure) the object can again belong to a separate category of sacrificial objects, but it has to retain a resemblance to what is useful: this is the way to relate the sacrificial object to the violent appropriation that instrumentalisation constitutes.[9]

The operation of *mimesis* is at work in still another instance: not only in the relationship between the surrogate victim and the actual sacrificial victim, but also in that between the originary conditions and the ritual re-enactment. The rite of sacrifice reproduces the supposedly historical conditions of violent chaos, subsequent unanimity and shift from dread to respect towards the victim, and it does so in the form of a theatrical re-enactment that is no longer based on actual circumstances. In view of this we can say that representation constitutes the very essence of sacrifice, and that through these representational mechanism the dreadful originary non-difference becomes both mastered and sacralised:

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[9] We will see how the instrumentalisation of objects has, for Bataille, a character analogous to (if not that of a prerequisite for) the imposition of social order: human beings cannot but feel that social order entails a violent profanation of the sacred, animal state of intimacy, and thus institute it through a ritual return to this state (sacrifice), just as in the realm of objects, the boundless continuity that objects enjoyed within nature is violently profanated by their being instrumentalised, their separation from the cycles of generation and decay; therefore instrumentalisation is only legitimised by the other version of sacrifice: the ritual relinquishing of the usefulness of an object (the gift, the offering).

'[...] the *representation* of non-difference ultimately becomes the very exemplar of difference, a classic monstrosity that plays a vital role in sacred ritual'.[10]

Another structure of illusory substitution takes place at the level of participation in the ritual: sacrifice generates in the viewer the *illusion* of identification with the victim, and prompts the experience of one's own death. This is the reason why, for Bataille, sacrifice is necessarily linked to an experience of anguish in the participants: the rite is an interplay with appearances, but one that allows us to *experience* death, if only through an identification provoked by theatrical illusion.

The representational essence of sacrifice is not exhausted in its mimetic character: sacrifice is only such if it is capable of being reproduced; it involves repetition, re-enactment and re-creation, and this is another characteristic on which its ritual nature depends. As a historical event, or an isolated happening, a sacrificial offering is not significant; even if it is always dependent on an origin, and presupposing an initial historical event, this is only meaningful from within the series of repetitions that always presuppose the origin and make it inaccessible in its founding character (since the original moment is, by definition, that which cannot be recovered).

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[10] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 64.

As a rite made up of mechanisms that are both aesthetic and religious in nature, sacrifice is the necessary requirement of any process of objectification, including the process of an aesthetic positing of objects. The duality of the subject-object structure relies on a breach operated on a previously unified continuity and sanctioned by the act of sacrifice. The positing of separate objects is for Bataille the first crime against the immanent continuity of the sacred world: this objectification is achieved by *using* objects, by assigning them an utility and thus transforming them into tools or instruments, instead of remaining just goods to be consumed. The sacred immanence of a relationship to change (objects at man's immediate disposal), is replaced by the subordination of change to duration (objects as perpetuators of the same, objects becoming *useful,* opening a breach in the continuity of change). Instrumental value is thus the origin of both objectification and detachment from immanent sacredness. It is for this reason that a price has to be paid to the divinity for this initial sacrilegous act of violence, and this is done through the ritual of sacrifice.[11] Sacrifice is the sanction that the profane world of instrumentality needs to subsist: objectification has to expiate its crime (has to

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[11] For the purpose of this explanation, it is not necessary to distinguish here between the sacrificial offering of an inanimate object and that of an animate one: both belong in this context to the category of objects. Let us add that, under this view, a human sacrificial victim must be killed in order to ritually relinquish his or her *objective* quality, and this is what made the category of the slaves or the *pharmacy* particularly apt to provide sacrificial victims, since they had an almost unacknowledged human status.

be reconciled with the sacred) through a ritual relinquishing of its own essence which is at the same time a justification and a painful sanction.

In sacrifice the object is posited in order to be destroyed, the individual solicited in order to die; killing and consumption restore the victim to boundless sacredness:

> the principle of sacrifice is destruction, but [...] the destruction that sacrifice is intended to bring about is not annihilation. The thing — only the thing — is what sacrifice means to destroy in the victim. Sacrifice destroys an object's real ties of subordination; it draws the victim out of the world of utility and restores it to that of unintelligible caprice.[12]

Since sacrifice is the ritual restitution of an object to the original sacred realm of non-differentiation, sacrifice is also the inaugural moment of objectification: in this sense any process of objectification rests on an original sacrificial moment that, within a single representational structure, establishes a covenant between utility and sacredness, between the instrumental value of the individual object and the sacred continuity that it relinquishes.

Representation within sacrifice appears thus tied to its condition of possibility; it depends on a lack of difference whose rupture has to be

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[12] Bataille *Theory of Religion*, p. 43.

sanctioned by ritual: only when the tribute to the undifferentiated is acknowledged can representation and the positing of the object remain within the sacred sphere. What is more, only when the undifferentiated has been paid tribute to in ritual representation is it then *revealed* as sacred. If this mutual dependence is forgotten, if a process of representation and objectification can no longer be retraced to a sacrificial structure, then aesthetic activity moves from sacrifice to sacrilege, becoming a sinful or even a blasphemous activity. Some modern religions offer attitudes that can be interpreted according to this alleged distance: the Moslem prohibition regarding figurative representation, and the Protestant mistrust of ornament and visual display. The fact that in these instances aesthetic practice is charged with a negative religious value, in relation to dogmas that are central to each creed, corroborates the claim of an original link between the experience of sacredness and the secularising power of representation: representation is sensed to stand in an *essential* relation of opposition to the ecstatic, non-representational experience of sacredness, and the essential character of this opposition is already an index of a structure of dependence.

Regarding sacrifice as the foundational structure of both sacredness and the aesthetic, the continuous sequence of ritual, myth and drama appears consistent. In relation to sacrificial rituals, myth is the first step towards the forgetting of the originary mutual dependence of continuity and objectification. Myth is always a narrative that conceals the dreadful power of undifferentiation and unrestrained forces through a system of differences; it is therefore an

accentuation of the ritual positing of differences, although in myth there is a deliberate concealment of its own basis through a resort to order, narrativity, systematicity and clarity. However, this concealment cannot help acting as a revealing, and thus mythic narrative contains an essential ambiguity that echoes sacrifice's own doubleness. In this respect the image that Nietzsche offers in *The Birth of Tragedy* of the religion of classical Greece participates in the striving for clarity that betrays itself:

> the Greeks knew and felt the fears and horrors of existence: in order to be able to live at all they had to interpose the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians between themselves and those horrors [...]. The same impulse that calls art into existence, the complement and apotheosis of existence, also created the Olympian world with which the Hellenic 'will' held up a transfiguring mirror to itself.[13]

Yet the Olympian world presupposes at its centre the obscurity that it covers and the suffering that it redeems. Chaos and undifferentiation are ascribed to the Titanic era by Olympian myths, but in a gesture that reveals a relationship more intimate than that of a sequential overcoming.

But even myth's tentative disavowal of its obscure centre is openly destabilised by the mechanisms of tragic drama. In tragedy we are acquainted with the sacrificial origins of myth, for what tragedy portrays in frightful tension is the cultural order and the absence of differences; the terms of this

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[13] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, pp. 22-3.

tension restate a sacrificial structure: human or heroic virtue (the Apolline clarity of the hero, in Nietzsche's vocabulary) ultimately has to pay a price to the powers of darkness when it becomes *hybris*. However, the development of the tragic plot rests not on a closure but on a dramatic questioning of order; in other words, on a questioning of mythic narratives that traces them back to an inaugural moment of instability. By showing the genealogy of myths, tragedy makes apparent the link between them and the institution of sacrifice. Myths appear thus as the necessary consequence of an overcoming of chaos and continuity through a ritual pact with them: mythical narrative is the consequence of the sacrificial structure of objectification. On the other hand, the dynamicity of tragedy questions the stability of mythical narrative and thus restores it to the ambiguity that was present at its original moment of engenderment: in the sacrificial moment.

> [...] Tragedy is by its very nature a partial deciphering of mythological motifs. The poet brings the sacrificial crisis back to life; he pieces together the scattered fragments of reciprocity and balances elements thrown out of kilter in the process of being 'mythologised'.[14]

That is, what constitutes the dramatic plot is a deliberate erasing of differences that traces the mythic tales back to an origin of non-differentiation, to a 'sacrificial crisis' that then appears with all its dreadful power.

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[14] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 64-65

Whether this original moment, previous to the institution of sacrifice and the subsequent elaboration of myths, is a moment in history or in a conceptual chain, does not seem to throw any light on the issue. Girard often refers to this moment ('reciprocal violence' or 'sacrificial crisis' in his terminology, 'Titanic world' in Nietzsche's) as an actual state of affairs of a community's past history. What characterises this origin, however, is an indeterminacy with respect to its qualification as fact or speculation, and yet a necessary relation to actuality; the question of whether what is being referred here is an actual event (rather than just a theoretical moment in a chain of reasoning) is essentially unsolvable and yet has to remain open for the very concepts to retain their force: such is the logic of the eliciting of the absolute origin; 'could the condition of possibility of actuality have been actual in some distant past?' is a paradoxical question that in this context may remain posited and unanswered.

The space of unrestrained force that this original moment inhabits, before sacrifice's covenant and its mythic elaboration, is the space of dissolution that the Dionysiac element in tragedy constitutes for Nietzsche. This space can only be properly called Dionysiac (and not Titanic, for example) when it has been transfigured by the sacrificial structure that tragedy at once questions and unveils as myth's ambiguous basis.

The internal link between sacrifice and theatricality, shown to be within sacrifice's own original structure and also in the re-elaborations of classic tragic drama, re-appears at the birth of the modern European dramatic tradition. Our own tradition of play-writing springs from the theatricality of medieval representations of Christ's Passion: the central sacrificial mystery of Christianity as dramatic matter shows then a continuity with a classic literary tradition that would seem otherwise to be fully interrupted.[15]

3.3. The Representational Disambiguation of the Sacred

The original experience of the sacred is essentially ambiguous: sacredness is both seen as a dreadful power and a venerable force. It is easy to associate these mixed conceptions to an originary experience of the forces of nature: nature is both perceived as the original mother and the obstacle for the unfolding of human possibilities. The same ambiguity is to be found in what within the human realm reproduces the destructive power of nature: in human violence. For Girard, violence retains the double quality of what destructs and pacifies: reciprocal violence, based on a pattern of reprisal, threatens with total destruction, whereas ritual violence acts as the only effective pacifying mechanism.

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[15] See in this respect, Nietzsche's lucid comment on Shakespeare in 1.4. above.

For Bataille, the continuity in which sacredness places us is both a dreadful dissolution of our human essence and a lost intimacy that we long to recover, in an attempt to reconcile ourselves with the authenticity that we perceive our own animality to be:

> [...] the animal accepted the immanence that submerged it without apparent protest, whereas man feels a kind of impotent horror in the sense of the sacred. This horror is ambiguous.[16]

And the ambiguity of sacredness itself spreads to what propitiates it, be it the surrogate victim, the Greek *pharmakos* or the actual sacrificial victim. Oedipus, as a stereotype of the surrogate victim, becomes an ambivalent figure:

> the mysterious union of the most evil and the most beneficial forces is of vital concern to the community, and can neither be challenged nor ignored [...]. The beneficial Oedipus at Colonus supersedes the earlier, evil Oedipus, but he does not negate him. [...] If Oedipus is indeed the savior of the community, it is because he is a patricidal and incestuous son.[17]

Similarly the *pharmakos*, a social outcast belonging to a reservoir of sacrificial victims, is covered by a veil of ambivalence:

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[16] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*. p.36.

[17] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 86.

[...] the pharmakos, like Oedipus himself, has a dual connotation. On the one hand he is a woebegone figure, an object of scorn who is also weighed down with guilt; a butt for all sorts of gibes, insults, and of course, outbursts of violence. On the other hand, we find him surrounded by a quasi-religious aura of veneration; he has become a sort of cult object.[18]

Let us remember that the very term *pharmakon*, as Girard points out, means both medicine and poison, as well as an enchanted potion.

Between these opposites (violence-peace, scornful-venerable, medicine-poison), a continuity is reproduced again in the ancient Chorybantic rites, which claimed to cure madness precisely by an intensification of the disease's symptoms.[19] In this context, an account of Christian redemption through Christ's sacrifice, such as the one provided by T. S. Eliot in 'East Coker', shows its debt to ancient religious views:

> Our only health is the disease
> If we obey the dying nurse
> Whose constant care is not to please
> But to remind of our, and Adam's curse,

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[18] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 95.

[19] See Erwin Rhode, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*, trans. W. B. Hillis (London: Routledge, 1925 (r. 1950)), pp. 286-7.

And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse.[20]

Modern notions of sacredness normally lose sight of this original ambiguity, of this continuity between good and evil. The notion of holiness, for example, already relies on a disambiguation and therefore on an implicit sacrificial structure. Even more so in the case of an elaborate notion of holiness, such as that of Rudolf Otto, according to whom what is holy is identified with what remains essentially other.[21] Here the holy is restored its mysterious and frightful aspect, but in its being essentially alien to human constitution it differs from an original sacredness that is also felt through human violence and animality.

The fluidity between the natural and the human realm affects the distinction between natural and spiritual evil. Natural disasters are given a religious significance, and those range from floods to epidemics. Indeed, the model of contagion is used as a pattern to discern between pure and impure: the notions of contact, continuity and intimacy carry negative connotations; impurity is associated with an indiscriminate spreading, with a levelling off of differences. Yet the positing of differences, the sacrificial act, itself belongs to the continuity that is both exorcised and paid tribute to. It is in this sense that sacrifice constitutes an intensification of the disease, an accentuation that only by virtue of its ritual and *representational* components is able to operate a

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[20] T. S. Eliot, 'East Coker' V, in *Collected Poems*, pp. 201-2.

[21] See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. J. W. Harvey (Oxford University Press, 1923 (rpt. 1936)).

transformation upon an otherwise inescapable impurity. After the sacrificial act the victim becomes an object of worship, and contact with the victim is sought as much as before it was avoided; most categories undergo a reversal: impure becomes pure, contagious becomes curative, and dreadful becomes desirable. Even if still presupposing and paying tribute to continuity, sacrifice is the act in relation to which distinctions are drawn. The same elements have a propitious or unpropitious nature depending on whether they are before or after, within of without sacrifice: the blood of murder is different from ritual blood, and this also has to do with a system of images for which the colour and texture of coagulated blood is already tinted with impurity. The disambiguation that sacrifice operates is only possible thanks to mechanisms that lie at the basis of aesthetic reproduction: because sacrificial ritual involves substitution, *mimesis*, representation and repetition, the original doubleness of sacredness can be surpassed, even if revealed as a condition of this surpassing.

Therefore, the clue for an understanding of sacrifice is not only its mimetic character (emphasised by Girard), but also how the representational aspects appear as part of a fluidity that renders them contingent, always dependent on the non-difference that they hide. In sacrifice *mimesis* (the miming of an original moment, of a sacrificial crisis) seems to play as important a role as *methexis*, participation (the insertion in public theatricality). This duality of process, that once again yields to analogy with Nietzsche's scheme of aesthetic forces, characterises sacrifice as the inaugural aesthetic moment because of the inclusion of its own impossibility, because of its constitutive and

yet never fully realisable tendency to become something other than itself (a *successful* mimetic mirroring or a means of *full* communion): in establishing an impossible reconciliation between representation and its source it renders the movement of representation infinite.

3.4. The Sacrificial Questioning and Setting of Boundaries

Since in sacrifice objects are solicited in order to be destroyed, and victims in order to die, the boundaries that sacrifice creates are only such in the showing of their own futility and illusory character. The setting of boundaries is essentially tied to a questioning of boundaries, to a revealing of their illusory nature; yet after the ritual sanction, after the sacrificial acknowledgement of the illusoriness of boundaries, the world of objects and individuals is legitimised. As long as sacrifice is re-enacted, it is permissible to reduce objects to their use and individuals to their autonomous subjectivity: sacrifice as the tribute to continuity perpetuates the link between the boundaries of everyday experience and the boundaries rendered illusory in the ritual, and thus the world of everyday manipulation and social interaction is granted a sacred sanction. The doubleness of the notion of sanction already refers to the legitimising power of sacrifice: sanction as penalty is also sanction as validation (sacrifice as grounding is also sacrifice as questioning, as renouncement). The only legitimising sanction for the world of discontinuous objects and individuals has

to come from a ritual relinquishing of their own status as such. Making use again of Nietzschean terminology, the Apolline world of well defined edges arises as an artistic response to the original terror before the 'tyranny of the real', and its illusory status is revealed on the tragic stage, where through a sacrificial deciphering of the myths heroic virtue is shown in all its futility.

Therefore, the loss of boundaries in sacrifice (or rather the questioning of boundaries that is the condition of their own legitimacy) runs parallel to a loss of the self. The illusory nature of the boundaries of the individual is the same as that of the boundaries of objects. The restitution of the victim to sacredness through its death dissolves the objective quality of the victim, not only by destroying the victim's ties to the objectifying world of labour (in the case of the sacrifice of a slave or of animals used in farming), but also by destroying the boundaries that characterise the victim as a separate entity. Moreover, by virtue of the ritual mechanisms of participation, the death of the victim is also experienced by the participants, in so far as they identify themselves with the victim:

> if one describes the individual in the operation of sacrifice , he is defined by anguish. But if sacrifice is distressing, the reason is that the individual takes part in it. The individual identifies with the victim in the sudden movement that restores it to immanence (to intimacy) [...].[22]

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[22] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 51.

And this process of identification is again analogous to the spectator's identification with the fallen hero of tragic drama, which is in turn a recalling of the ritual loss of the self involved in Dionysiac experience. The self is dissolved in order to escape the world of utility and discontinuous objects, of 'thinghood', and return to the realm of boundless sacredness:

> [...] the assimilation that is linked to the return to immanence is nonetheless based on the fact that the victim is the thing, just as the sacrificer is the individual. The separate individual is of the same nature as the thing, or rather the anxiousness to remain personally alive that establishes the person's individuality is linked to the integration of existence into the world of things.[23]

It is precisely a questioning of the boundaries of selfhood, of its unitary character, what constitutes one of the fundamental traits of the exploration of inner experience that Modernist literature carries out. It is then not surprising that the structure that legitimises this breaking loose of the world of subjective experience is shown with some level of explicitness: both in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* and in Eliot's *Four Quartets* we find a sacrificial structure around which the texts revolve.

In *A Portrait of the Artist* the Christian ritual of the Eucharist is constantly referred to in connection with both Stephen's personal experience of

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[23] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 51.

religion (e.g. his associations at the time of his first communion) and his conscious rejection of religious bonds (e.g. his refusal to make his Easter duty). However, the sacrifice that the novel most clearly points to is that of Stephen's self himself, or rather, that of his own individuality. Even though there is no resolution within the story, the tensions that Stephen's enhanced selfhood generate in relation to his artistic views call for a sacrificial resolution. This is already foreshadowed in the narrative, when in the episode by the river, Stephen is called 'Bous Stephaneforos' by his schoolmates;[24] Stephen, form the Greek *stephanos* means wreath, garland, and hence the image of Stephen as an ox garlanded for sacrifice (a *bous stephanephoros*).[25] The immediate context does not throw any light on this association, but the novel as a whole does.

In *Four Quartets*, the centrality of sacrificial structure begins to be apparent in the importance assigned to the mystery of the Incarnation. This becomes for Eliot the point of intersection of timelessness and time, as the answer to a speculative exploration of the experience of time that runs through the poems. Then, the motif of God's Incarnation in Christ is deployed in relation to its intended sacrificial end: Christ's Passion carries within the poems

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[24] See Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 182.

[25] (βοῦς στεφανεφορος) For an alternative interpretation, see David Weir, 'Epiphanoumenon', in *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 31 no. 2, Winter 1994, p. 55.

the resonances of an intoxicating sacrifice (as shown in the fragment from 'East Coker' quoted above, in 3.3).

What the allusions to sacrificial acts ultimately confirm is the originary sacrificial structure at the origin of a dissolution of boundaries, and in particular of the boundaries of the individual self. The Modernist exploration of an inner experience no longer circumscribed to subjectivity manifestly shows in these two instances the ancient mechanisms that make it possible.

3.5. The Sacrificial Questioning of Identity

A question of the self eventually involves a questioning of identity, since the stability of entities that remain identical to themselves reflects and is reflected in the unitary character of an 'I' (or an 'eye') that surveys them. G. Bataille establishes a sequence and interdependence between the positing of the object (as instrument), the positing of the self as object and the positing of identity itself. For an object to be no more than what it is, the self cannot be other than itself, and ultimately nothing more than a unitary, self-identical consciousness.

Sacrifice both disrupts and makes possible this correspondence between the self-identity of consciousness and that of its objects. The principle of sacrifice is precisely the breaking of the boundaries that guarantee identity: objects and individualities are revealed to be *in excess* of themselves, to be more

than what they are, and hence their essential link to the obscurity of otherness.[26] The irrecuperable surplus that constitutes the sacred character of objects and individualities is broken loose by the removal of the illusory boundaries of their own identities. Yet again, in the double movement that characterises sacrifice, this removal is precisely the sacred sanction that the thinking of identity needs to continue its development with legitimacy. Just as the ground for objectification involved a price to be paid to the sacred realm of non-objectification for the violence exerted on it, now the legitimisation of identity analogically relies on a price to be paid to the world of excess.

The transition from a thought of non-identity to a thought of identity (to one that has been legitimised by a sacrificial process) can be illuminated by a consideration of the philosophical statements of Heraclitus. Heraclitus' direct engagement with an erasing of differences, with a thinking of the flux that is also a flux of thinking, bears the resonances of what Girard calls a 'sacrificial crisis', that is, a dissolution of the sacrificial structure:

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[26] In this ultimate push to the logic of sacrifice, I am forced to privilege scrutiny over intelligibility, and thus use expressions as paradoxical as 'things that are more than what they are', or 'selves that are in excess of themselves'. I hope that the lack of clarity of this section shows precisely how difficult and dangerous it is to scrutinise the logic of sacrifice with an instrument that falls somehow outside its domain: the intelligibility of language.

> the fifth fragment of Heraclitus quite clearly deals with the decay of sacrificial rites, with their inability to purify what is impure. Religious beliefs are compromised by the decadent state of the ritual [...].[27]

Heraclitus' thought participates in this erasing of differences previous to the effectiveness of sacrifice, being aware of the precariousness of the structuring power of sacrificial structure. Girard, talking of his own enquiry into the fundamental mechanisms of the ritual, tells us:

> Heraclitus, who has been called the 'philosopher of tragedy' and who has equal claim to the title 'philosopher of myth' seems to have been on the track of the same structuring force I am now pursuing.[28]

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[27] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p.43. Heraclitus' fragment, in Diels' edition, reads:

καθαίρονται δ' ἄλλωι αἵματι μιαινόμενοι οἷον εἴ τις εἰς πηλὸν ἐμβὰς πηλῶι ἀπονίζοιτο. μαίνεσθαι δ' ἂν δοκοίη, εἴ τις αὐτὸν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιφράσαιτο οὕτω ποιέοντα. καὶ τοῖς ἀγάλμασι δὲ τουτέοισιν εὔχονται, ὁκοῖον εἴ τις δόμοισι λεσχηνεύοιτο, οὔ τι γινώσκων θεοὺς οὐδ' ἥρωας οἵτινές εἰσι.

(Hermann Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 1, Zürich/Berlin: Weidmannsche, 1952 (r.1964), pp. 151-2). Cf. English version in Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to The Presocratic Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blacwell, 1948 (rpt. 1962)), p. 25: 'they purify themselves by staining themselves with other blood, as if one were to step into mud in order to wash off mud. But a man would be thought mad if any of his fellow men should perceive him acting thus. Moreover, they talk to these statues (*of theirs*) as if one were to hold conversation with houses, in his ignorance of the nature of both gods and heroes'. For Heraclitus as the 'tragic philosopher', see Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, in KGW III.3, fragment 5[94], p. 122.

Thus Heraclitus' engagement with contradiction and change (as a discourse of non-identity) is a form of questioning of an established religious structure that lays the basis for a thought of identity.

But the need for constant re-enactment of this foundational moment cannot help bringing about a qualitatively different structure; the ancient legitimisation of identity has its sequel in the modern forms of sacrifice, and more precisely, in the two sacrificial moments that bear the weight of the modern edifice of rationality and identity-thinking: the sacrifices of Socrates and Christ. In these two moments (Socrates' self-inflicted death and Christ's redemptive Passion), the structure of sacrifice makes a definitive step, and moves from sacrifice of the self to self-sacrifice, in an accentuation that lies parallel to the accentuation of the pretensions of the rationality that these two figures inaugurate, as the double figure of ontotheology.

At this point in the history of theory (not in the history of facts), identity thinking proper is born, due to the radical claims of transcendence, infinity and truth that Jean-Luc Nancy ascribes to these violent deaths:

> Western sacrifice is already infinite in being self-sacrifice, in being universal, and in revealing the spiritual truth of all sacrifice. But it is — and must be — infinite also insofar as it reabsorbs the finite moment of

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[28] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 88.

> sacrifice itself and thus in so far as it must, logically, sacrifice itself as sacrifice in order to accede to its truth.[29]

The intensification of the sacrificial structure that Socrates and Christ's sacrifice carry out destroys its own logic with its radicality: we have here not only a sacrifice of the self (of the identity of the victim with itself), but also a self-sacrifice (the victim is also the sacrificer) that turns upon itself with such a violence as to sacrifice the very act of sacrifice. The result of all this puzzling reflexivity is precisely the most efficient grounding of the respectability of identity-thinking, by virtue of a mechanism that in its radicalisation negates its own structure. The claims of universality, infinity and truth could have only been associated with this modern mechanism, which disavows itself from its predecessors through the reflexivity of intensification. For this reason Socrates and Christ are often taken to be, in many respects, the last sacrificial victims,

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[29] Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Unsacrificeable',trans. Richard Livingston, in *Yale French Studies no. 79: Literature and the Ethical Question*, (Yale University Press, 1991), p. 24. Nancy's article treats extensively the possibility of finding in the Nazi holocaust the traits of a sacrificial structure, which he finally does not concede. Even so, the fact that a close link can be established between the theoretical exploration of the origins of Western culture and the actual historical disintegration of that culture (together with others) through a world war, must warn us of the dangers of extracting conclusions out of this theoretical domain. I would also like to state here that, in my view, the misinterpretation and appropriation of Nietzsche's thought by Fascist ideologies was illegitimate even in terms of intellectual rigour, but also in these terms not entirely groundless, given the richness, the openness and the dangers that Nietzsche's text still contains.

and indeed they were in that they unveiled the uselessness of the sacrificial rites of their respective religions. They also try to fix the dynamicity of sacrifice, the elusive moment of appropriation, by a resort to the infinity of truth: theirs tries to be the last sacrifice in its being the definitive 'appropriation, by means of the transgression of the finite, of the infinite truth of the finite [...]'.[30]

The newness that this gesture claims for itself is also expressed in a new mimetic structure (with the consequence of a resistance to *methexis*), and in an attempt at sublation. In the structure of *mimesis* inherent to the ancient sacrifice (explored in 3.2.), the modern sacrifice (or rather the sacrifice that founds Modernity) introduces a breach, that J.-L. Nancy terms a 'mimetic rupture':

> the ancient sacrifice is reproduced — up to a certain point — in its form or its scheme; but it is reproduced so as to reveal an entirely new content, a truth hitherto hidden or misunderstood, if not perverted.[31]

The system of resemblances and substitutions of the sacrificial structure is now turned into the dual structure of form and hidden truth, giving place to the inauguration of a radical form of *mimesis*. It is then not surprising that modern sacrifice finds a great difficulty in relating its theatrical and representational

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[30] Nancy, 'The unsacrificeable', p. 25.

[31] Nancy, 'The Unsacrificeable', p. 21.

aspects to an original absence of boundaries conceptualised as participation (*methexis*):

> shouldn't we ask ourselves [...] whether, when Western thought insists on denouncing the simulacrum of the 'old' sacrifice, and on presenting the new sacrifice as the 'true' *mimesis* [...] of the other, it does not betray *an incapacity, or a refusal, to touch on methexis* [...] ?[32]

Finally, these new forms of sacrifice constitute an attempt at a *sublation* of the ancient sacrificial logic. The solid basis of a world of predictable regularities (of entities that remain identical with themselves), which is the parallel to a world of individual subjectivities, could only be granted by a gesture that tries to re-appropriate infinitely the flux that lies behind the positing of identity. Only thus could truth and universality result from a ritual structure:

> sacrifice as self-sacrifice, universal sacrifice, truth, and sublation of sacrifice, is itself the institution of the absolute economy of absolute subjectivity, which can only mimic (in the pejorative sense) a passage

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[32] Nancy, 'The Unsacrificeable', p. 26, note 12. This structure seems to have lost , therefore, an essential dimension of the ancient sacrifice: the tension between $\mu\iota\mu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ and $\mu\varepsilon\theta\varepsilon\xi\iota\varsigma$, representation and participation, and it is in this difference that it tries to be foundational for Modernity, just as Socrates tried to do away with Greek religion by enacting himself a pseudo-religious rite to which his impiety had led him. This explains why Socrates is for Nietzsche, among other things, the main culprit in the disappearance of the religious and aesthetic tension between the Dionysiac and the Apolline.

> through negativity, from which, symmetrically, it cannot but reappropriate or trans-appropriate itself infinitely.[33]

An this infinite re-appropriation within this single moment *sublates* the partial fundational moments of all past sacrificial acts.

Nevertheless, the breach between the ancient and the new sacrifice is not as conclusive as it appears to be, and the attempt at closure of ontotheology's foundation carries its own failure because of the inescapable logic of sacrifice to which, after all, is subjected. In so far as Socrates' and Christ's are still sacrifices, since "*sublation is ultimately incapable of knowing what is truly involved in repetition and mimesis, and so in sacrifice*",[34] their sacrifices remain essentially linked to the ancient ones, restating an interplay of obscurity and clarity, of identity and flux, that trespasses the history of modern rationality throughout.

The claims of a definitive revealing or a final accomplishment are vain within the logic of sacrifice (even of self-sacrifice), which is governed by the aesthetic mechanisms of representation and repetition. Nancy tells us of 'the slow displacement, the long drifting, that led Bataille to denounce the *theatre* of sacrifice and consequently to renounce its successful accomplishment'.[35]

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[33] Nancy, 'The Unsacrificeable', p. 27.

[34] Nancy, 'The Unsacrificeable', p. 27.

[35] Nancy, 'The Unsacrificeable', p. 21.

Accomplishment and closure can only be grounded on sacrifice, but are always rendered illusory in the uncovering of this grounding. Sacrifice reveals as it conceals, but can never come to a close in its revealing or concealing; conversely, a process of demystification loses its sacrificial origin as soon as it comes to a conclusion, and thus casts a shadow upon its own validity:

> [...] our penetration and demystification of the system necessarily coincides with the disintegration of that system. The act of demystification retains a sacrificial quality and remains essentially religious in character for at least as long as it fails to come to a conclusion.[36]

Thus modern sacrifice, with all its attempted closure, remains tied to an ancient continuity that stretches beyond itself. And we can find, even in these self-sacrifices that are taken to be the foundation of ontotheology, the inescapable ancient traits that run against the secularising force that they also contain.

3. 6. The Christian Sacrifice of God

So far we have assumed an essential kinship between Pagan and Christian sacrifice, in opposition to the idea of a true foundational status in Socrates and Christ's sacrifice, but perhaps this is the moment to explore some of the

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[36] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 24.

differences, specially if we keep in mind that for the aesthetic tradition which springs from Nietzsche and that we will find in Modernist writing, this kinship was far from clear. Let us then pay attention to one of the crucial points of Nietzsche's engagement with the sacrificial character of Christianity, indeed probably his most celebrated dictum on Christianity: aphorism 125 of *The Gay Science*, the proclamation of the 'death of God', and let us also listen to the lucid and unorthodox commentary that René Girard offers on this aphorism.[37] Nietzsche´s text reads:

> *The madman.* — Have you not heard of that madman who in a clear morning lit a lantern, run to the marketplace and kept on shouting: 'I'm looking for God! I'm looking for God!.' Since at the time there stood many of those who didn't believe in God, he gave rise to a burst of laughter. 'Is he then missing?', said one of them. 'Has he got lost like a child?' said another one. 'Or does he keep himself hidden? Is he afraid of us? Has he taken a boat and emigrated?' — Thus they shouted and laughed all at once. The madman jumped in the middle of them and pierced them with his gaze: 'Where has he gone?' , he cried. 'I will tell you! *We have killed him*, — you and me! We are all his murderers! But, how could we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to blur the horizon? What did we do, as we severed this Earth from its Sun? Where is she going now? Where are we going? To

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[37] See René Girard, 'Le meurtre fondateur dans la pensée de Nietzsche', in Paul Dumouchel (ed.), *Violence et verité aoutur de René Girard: Colloque de Cerisy* (Paris: Grasset et Fasquelle, 1985), pp. 597-613. Translated as *Violence and Truth* (London: Athlone, 1987). I have preferred to use my own translations for the quotations from this article.

the absence of any sun? Are we not perpetually falling? And backwards, sidewards, forward, toward all directions? Is there still an 'above' and a 'below'? Are we not wandering like through an endless nothingness? Does not the vacuum blow on us? Is it not getting colder? Does not the night come continuously, and ever longer? Do we not need to lit up lanterns in the morning? Do we not hear the noise of the gravediggers who bury God? Do we not smell God's putrefaction? — gods rot too! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! The holiest and the mightiest being which the world has had so far, he has bled under our knives. — Who cleans us of this blood? What water will purify us? What expiatory festivals, what sacred games will we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we not become gods ourselves so that we appear worthy before him? There was never a greater deed, — and all those who will be born after us will belong, because of this deed, to a greater history than any history so far. [...]'[38]

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[38] *Der tolle Mensch.* — Habt ihr nicht von jenem tollen Menschen gehört, der am hellen Vormittage eine Laterne anzündete, auf den Markt lief und unaufhörlich schrie: 'Ich suche Gott! Ich suche Gott!' — Dadort gerade Viele von Denen zusammen standen, welche nicht an Gott glaubten, so erregte er ein grosses Gelächter. Ist er den verloren gegangen? sagte der Eine. Hat er sich verlaufen wie ein Kind? sagte der Andere. Oder hält er sich versteckt? Fürchtet er sich vor uns? Ist er zu Shiff gegangen? ausgewandert? — so schrieen und lachten sie ducheinander. Der tolle Mensch sprang mitten unter sie und durchbohrte sie mit seinen Blicken. 'Wohin ist Gott? rief er, ich will es euch sagen! *Wir haben ihn getödtet*, — ihr und ich! Wir Alle sind seine Mörder! Aber wie haben wir diess gemacht? Wie vermochten wei das Meer auszutrinken? Wer gab uns den Schwamm, um den ganzen Horizont wegzuwischen? Was thaten wir, als wir diese Erde von ihrer Sonne losketteten? Wohin bewegt sie sich nun? Wohin bewegen wir uns? Fort von allen Sonnen? Stürzen wir nicht fortwährend? Und rückwärts, seitwärts, vorwärts, nach

Previous statements made in this chapter are corroborated when Girard compares Nietzsche's aphorism with the texture of myth, ritual and Greek tragedy, in so far as the aphorism contains the description of the chaotic absence of differences:

> Within our aphorism, the very ghost of a centre has disappeared. This state of affairs renders our aphorism very similar to myths, rituals and Greek tragedy. Everywhere, in the primitive texts, the collective murder is associated with the mingling of day and night, heavens and earth, gods, men and animals. Monsters proliferate. Everything begins with the abolition of *differences*: the monstruous twins, the 'evil

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allen Seiten? Giebt es noch ein Oben und ien Unten? Irren wir nicht wie durch ein unendliches Nichts? Haucht uns nicht der leere Raum an? Ist es nicht kälter geworden? Kommt nicht immerfort die Nacht und mehr Nacht? Müssen nicht Laternen am Vormittage angezündet werden? Hören wir noch Nichts von dem Lärm der Todtengräber, welche Gott begraben? Riechen wir noch Nichts von den göttlichen Verwesung? — auch Götter verwesen! Gott ist todt! Gott bleibt todt! Un wir haben ihn getödtet! Wie trösten wir uns, die Mörder aller Mörder? Das Heiligste und Mächtisgste, was die Welt bisher besass, es ist unter unseren Messern verblutet, — wer wischt diess Blut von uns ab? Mit welchem Wasser Könnten wir uns reinigen? Welche Sühnfeiern, welche heiligen Spiele weden wir erfinden müssen? Ist nicht die Grösse dieser zu gross für uns. Müssen wir nicht selber zu Göttern werden, um nur ihrer würdig zu erscheinen? Es gab nie eine grössere That, — und wer nur immer nach uns geboren wird, gehört um dieser That willen in eine höhere Geschichte, als alle Geschichte bisher war'. (F. Nietzsche, *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* [*The Gay Science*], in KGW, Vol. V.2, pp. 158-159. My translation.)

> mixture' [in English in the original] of Shakespeare; the blending from which it is convenient to differ.[39]

This state of chaos which Girard refers to as the 'sacrificial crisis' previous to the ritual, occurs after the death of God. Is this not a sacrifice, a ritual, then? Is Nietzsche's death of God essentially different from Christ's Passion, which is undeniably a ritual sacrifice? Is this difference the reason why Modernity becomes a 'waste land'? This could be the case, if Nietzsche's prounouncement did not, in effect, correspond to the recording of a sacrifice. As shown in previous sections, the violence of sacrifice is at the centre of the establishing of boundaries and the legitimisation of identity, and therefore puts an end to the chaotic world through an engagement with representation. Girard, although tentatively, corroborates this:

> To treat as a *fixed idea* the mechanism of the scapegoat seems to me fair in so far as it fixes all ideas. That idea itself, however, does not owe its power of fixation but to the fact of existing under the form of the sacred, in other words, of not being totally an idea. Without this absence of idea, there is no coherent 'system of representation', no stable structure. Everything drifts according to the convenience of the sacrificial crisis [...]. Should we search for the engine of all symbolicity in the effect of the scapegoat?[40]

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[39] Girard, 'Le meurtre fondateur', p. 604. My emphasis.

[40] Girard, 'Le meurtre fondateur', p. 597.

Perhaps we should, as it seems only proper that the stability of representation had its centre in a vacuum, just as the Dionysiac groundlessness was for Nietzsche the *source* of form. But is Nietzsche talking about, or even *enacting*, a sacrifice in *The Gay Science*? We know of his reverence for the ritual of sacrifice, and we know how, retrospectively, he conceived of *The Birth of Tragedy* as an offer to the sea of excess:

> Many strange and not undangerous spirits have crossed my path, too, but above all he of whom I was speaking just now, and he again and again, namely, no less a one that the god Dionysus, that great ambiguous one and tempter god to whom I once offered, as you know, in all secrecy and reverence, my first born — as the last, it seems to me, who offered him a *sacrifice*: for I have found no one who understood what I was doing then.[41]

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[41] F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §295, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Press, 1966, pp. 234-235. [So sind auch mir manche seltsame und nicht ungefährliche Geister über den Weg gelaufen, vor allem aber der, von dem ich eben sprach, und dieser immer wieder, kein Geringerer nämlich als der Gott *Dionysos*, jener große Zweideutige und Versucher-Gott, dem ich einstmals, wie ihr wißt, in aller Heimlichkeit und Ehrfurcht meine Erstlinge dargebracht habe—als der Letzte, wie mir scheint, der ihm ein *Opfer* dargebracht hat: denn ich fand keinen, der es verstanden hätte, was ich damals tat. (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von gut und böse*, §295, in *Nietzsches Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. by Karl Schlechta, vol. II, Munich: Carl Hamser, 1952, p. 754.]

And do we understand what the madman is doing in *The Gay Science*? Let us notice that the emphasis on 'Got it tot' has displaced many of the other important statements that the aphorism contains: not only the poetic recreation on the description of a non-differentiated world, but also the fact that there are culprits for God's death, and that *we* are those culprits; this is, if not a sacrifice, at least a collective murder.:

> Nobody has ever derived from this text the collective murder. I take hold of it and, in less time than a psychoanalyst needs to say 'Oedipus complex', here it is, such as the head of John the Baptist on its silver tray. This is not a success, but a fatality. If I tried to take out of the aphorism the countless surprising things that our colleagues take, I would regretfully fail. Collective murder follows me like my own shadow.[42]

Thus here the emphasis is displaced to *us* as murderers, as accomplices of a collective killing. This renders the textual repercusions of this aphorism throughout history rather questionable, and makes us revise our own interpretations. Was this not then the definitive announcement of the desacralisation of the modern world and the disenchantment of nature? Was it not the revealing of the vacuity of authority and tradition? What do we have to add now to our interpretations of this pronouncement?

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[42] Girard, 'Le meurtre fondateur', p. 601.

this does not add anything, but it changes the sense of the text completely. The formula 'God is dead' has enjoyed and always enjoys an extraordinary success within our universe. This formula is endowed with such a powerful virtue that many successors of Nietzsche — but, are they really Nietzsche's successors? — get hold of it every day and canalise it through new domains so that they can make a name for themselves among men.[43]

Girard then adopts an ironic distance from the pompous tone of the consequences that our modernity has drawn out of this pronouncement:

> this tactic has produced spectacular results for a long time. Thanks to it, metaphysics is dead. We have all kept watch over it by its bedside. We have been in mourning for the whole of philosophy. And since around 1890, in each generation, we have informed in a solemn manner that man himself is dead. Each time, the sensation is enormous. Truth has been dead for a long time, and shortly after fashion. I have said myself that the death of God is in process of dying, and without doubt, I am in the process of repeating it. Nobody escapes the uncomfortable feeling of these funerary announcements.[44]

And it has been in order to veil the capacity to generate resonances and uncomfortable feelings by this aphorism that 'Nietzsche is taken as the great prophet of the *natural* death of God.[45] God dies not as the consequence of a

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[43] Girard, 'Le meurtre fondateur', p. 601.

[44] Girard, 'Le meurtre fondateur', p. 601.

[45] Girard, 'Le meurtre fondateur', p. 602.

murderous act of which we are all guilty, but as the consequence of the passing of time, of progress, of the advent of Enlightenment and Modernity:

> For Enlightenment philosophy, God cannot die but a natural death. Once the naive period of humanity is over, the religious ceases to be 'credible', as it is said nowadays. Rationalistic optimism has been regarded as dead for a long time, victim of the epidemic caused by the death of God. In fact, this optimism survives in the idea itself of a God that dies of senile exhaustion. This first idea presupposes a second: modern atheism is more *reasonable* than previous religion.[46]

But it is precisely in the last tract of our Modernity (we could even say, in the waste land that Modernism beholds) that this death is more acutely felt as a crisis:

> one is tempted to conclude that we are dealing with a 'more radical' version of the crisis, because it is 'modern', and more modern because it is radical. But perhaps this is only our version, for us, who are incapable of relativising. We cannot still ritualise it... Perhaps we need a collective murder once more...[47]

But a collective murder has no redemptory power if it is not a sacred act, and to see this 'collective murder of God' as a sacrifice, and therefore as a re-enactment

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[46] Girard, 'Le meurtre fondateur', p. 603.

[47] Girard, 'Le meurtre fondateur', p. 605.

of the theatricallity of Christ's Passion, we need to attend to the aesthetic co-ordinates to which Nietzsche is always attentive; Girard acknowledges this:

> to locate and understand this strange phenomenon, we need to view the use which is made of the aphorism *as* ritual itself, the sense of which Nietzsche reminds us. The ritual constists of *reproducing* the collective murder within the unrecognisability of the reproduced event [...]. The murder is indispensable for the ritual practice in so far as it remains unacknowledged. In order to sacralise it, it is necessary that the text contain illicitly the collective murder, but precisely in the sense of an illegitimate word, which implies dissimulation. If you pay heed to this, you will be placed within the domain of the 'aesthetic', or, even better, of the 'rhetorical' [...].[48]

We have already explored the aesthetic traits of ritual sacrifice, but precisely in the previous section (3.5), we seemed to ~~rest force to the facts~~ that there is a distinctive trait in Christian sacrifice, a particular founding character which is at the same time a reflexive movement and a cancelation, and thus tries to do away with the structure of sacrifice itself through the institution of ontotheology. Girard also acknowledges that Nietzsche had already detected this 'fundamental' difference at the core of Christianity and had treated it as such: for him, if the death of God is a collective murder or a Dionysiac sacrifice, it differs essentially from the sacrifice of the Passion:

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[48] Girard, 'Le meurtre fondateur', pp. 606-607

the point of view of the passion is not only contrary to that of Dionysus: it is a war machine against the last and all Paganism; it is an effort to discredit collective murder, to ruin the well-established, to destroy all the non-Christian religions by showing that they are founded upon an arbitrary violence [...]. The greatness of Nietzsche is that he apprehends the truth of Christianity with an incomparable power.[49]

However, I take it that Nietzsche apprehends the truth of Christianity even beyond the power that Girard concedes him: the fact that Nietzsche never fully abandoned an aesthetic view of reality results, in my view, from the fact that he too understood the theatricality of sacrifice that Bataille was later to denounce, including that of Christ's sacrifice. Nietzsche's engagement with rhetoric and aesthetics appears again, therefore, as the site from which to understand his crusade against a secularised Christianity oblivious to the aesthetic nature of its mechanisms of representation. Nietzsche's anti-redemptive move of the affirmation of the present and the positive stance in the face of the crisis of our Modernity, could very well be captured in Girard/terms:

> if the religious in our world has died of violent death, it will certainly be reborn under another form, and under which one matters little. The crisis of the modern world is nothing but an episode within an endless process. The prodigious importance that we attach to our history has the narrowness of our own vision.[50]

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[49] Girard, 'Le meurtre fondateur', p. 612.

[50] Girard, 'Le meurtre fondateur', p. 610.

And the re-birth of the religious, or of the sacred in our, broader terms, can take place within the text of a lived myth which retains the stamp of its ritual origin, as for Nietzsche the mythic element in Greek tragedy retained the sacrificial element of the Dionysiac chorus. In the terms of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Wagner is assigned the task of delivering a new, redemptive myth (a naivity, as is well known, which Nietzsche will later regret), but still within these terms, and leaving aside Wagner's music for the moment, the seed is planted for the Modernist rendering of the sacred in the form of literary mythopoeia, and the mythic element will persist in Nietzsche's work up to the very end.

4.Myth and Secularisation: From Sacred Speech to Philosophy and Literature

Accounts of myth[1] and mythic modes of thinking are often sketched in relation to modern descendants (religion, philosophy, science, literature) for which myth provides a common primordial ground no longer recuperable and supposedly surpassed. In contrast, an account of myth that focuses on its own genealogy, rather than on its founding nature, throws a different light on the mythical character of our modern discourses. From this perspective, myth, although still a speech charged with the quality of the sacred, is already the first step in the process of secularisation that has the philosophical *logos* as its vortex and results in our modern scientific notions of objectivity.[2]

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[1] To have a definition around which to work, let us say that a myth is a narrative, with a foundational cultural character, which makes intelligible to humans their relationships with their surroundings; therefore it usually accounts for origins and destiny, and it differs from legend and folk tales in its foundational and sacred character, which disappears only for those of whose culture it is not constitutive: a myth is only a myth if regarded as a myth.

[2] The already secularising character of myth, undestood as part of an inner dialectic,is thematised in T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer. *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming; Verso: London, 1997 (1st ed. Social Studies Association: New York, 1944.)

The emphasis is thus displaced from myth to what precedes it and constitutes its condition of possibility: to the original ambiguity of the rituals, and among them, of the ritual of sacrifice, whose structure seems to be paradigmatic of the exchange with the divine.[3] Within the sphere of the ritual we find in its originary form the fundamental experience of sacredness that myth incorporates to its own narrative pattern. Whether in the form of boundlessness, purity, or otherness, the sacred values within mythic stories are retraceable to a ritual structure that precedes them, even if not in the order of events. The priority of ritual over myth, regarding the reducibility of one to the other, runs somehow against classical anthropological views, and has continued to be a subject of debate,[4] but it allows for a more thorough understanding of myth if we suspend to an extent a pronouncement on the dependence on recorded facts.[5] This priority is the basic idea

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[3] See chapter 3, section 3.1.

[4] See Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. by Janet Loyd (New York: Zone Books, 1988), pp. 239 ff., against G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 8 ff. René Girard had expressed a view similar to Vernant's (see chapter 3, note 1).

[5] It is of no importance for our argument if, for instance, as the result of a particular narrative in praise or gratitude to the gods, a particular ritual cult was established for the first time, involving the boundlessness of a sacrifice or a gift-giving; nor is it relevant whether recorded materials happen to prove the contrary or a generalisation of either: what we have in mind for our argument is the conceptual priority of ritual over myth rather than an actual sequence of events.

which underlies a view of myth as a first step away from an original intimacy with sacredness, and therefore as containing essentially the same secularising force which lies at the heart of subsequent discourses, namely philosophy and, more recently, modern science, the latter being heir to one of the possible unfoldings of philosophical *logos*.

If myth can already be secularising, if myth gets closer to philosophy in its distance from ritual, then it ceases to be suitable for appropriation by the artistic and literary traditions only, and discloses the non-rational grounds of our tradition of rationality, which springs from our philosophical ancestors; these grounds of rationality are not only confronted to the artistic manifestations that our modern secularised age has deprived of any claim to truth or sacred value proper; these grounds are also present at the founding gesture of our metaphysical tradition, which can be then seen as a *mythical* dismissal of what of ritual remains in myth. This is the gesture that Plato seems to make,[6] both Plato the mythologist and Plato the philosopher, a gesture answered centuries later, within one of the crises of our modernity, by the mythologizing philosophy of F. W. Nietzsche, in an attempt, this time, to *close* the history of Western metaphysics. However, the reason why Plato can be said to inaugurate the history of metaphysics is not only his commitment to a *logos* that is irreconcilable with myth (Socrates had expressed similar impiety

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[6]A gesture that in its ambiguity, as we will see later, cannot but incorporate in the mythical dismissal of myth the sacred dimension of the ritual.

earlier, and had been rightly condemned for doing so); it is also the fact that Plato writes, and by writing he takes a further distance from the narrativity of myth, one of whose essential traits is orality. Plato's myths are written, and by so being, and standing within the text in contrast to the philosophical pursuit of truth, they inaugurate a distinction which had not been truly operative until that moment: that between philosophy and literature. Despite the previous artistic self-awareness of the literary writers of classical Greece, it is only through Plato's distinction that our modern concept of literature can be applied to works such as those of Homer and Hesiod.

I would like to argue that there is a point of convergence between Nietzsches's attacks on the metaphysical tradition that Plato inaugurates and the inspirational value of Nietzsche's ideas for the aesthetics of literary Modernism: in both of these responses to moments of modern cultural crisis a certain understanding of mythical ambiguity (not lacking in Plato) and of its power, governs the impetus of the whole discourse. In Nietzsches's philosophy, and particularly in his early works, there is an explicitly positive valuation of the myth-making activity of our Greek cultural ancestors, but also an active engagement in myth-making, which will become clearest later in his work, in the mythic voice of Zarathustra. Modernist literature, in its turn, develops a treatment of the mythic plots and of mythic modes of narrating that can be said to be essentially different from the previous literary appropriations of the mythic past, in that now the

fictional nature of the texts constitutes a continuum with the insights and contents that they try to convey: this is an emphasis on fictional character as a guarantor of truth, and this constitutes the paradox of Modernis mythopoeia.

From this perspective, Nietzsche, in his engagement with myth (with the fictional character of myth) recovers for philosophy the respect for the sacred sphere that mythical narratives still retain and Modernist literature tries to re-enact, thus making up for Socrates' disrespectfulness and the age-long interpretation of the ambiguous Platonic expulsion of literature from the republic of truth.

4.1. Sacred Speech

If sacredness is defined only in relation to ritual, and this in turn defined through the all-encompassing structure of sacrifice, how is it that mythic speech remains sacred, and how is it related to the original sacrificial structure? Following Bataille's theory of sacrifice, we can conceive of ritual sacrifice as the theatrical interplay between objectifying forces and those of non-objectification. The ritual consumption of the object or of the victim restores them to the boundlessness of the sacred world, but at the same time this non-objectifiable sacredness can only be such within a fixed structure.[7] In the forever unresolved tension between boundless

[7] For a clarification of these notions, see above, 3.1 and 3.2.

continuity and objectification that sacrifice constitutes, myth introduces a breach: the awe-inspiring vertigo of the loss of boundaries, the cruelty of the ritual, is concealed under the recognizable texture of a narrative with clear limits; yet the narrativity of myth has not the clarity of the visual arts, and remains irremediably tied to the ritual sacredness from which it springs: upon analysis, most classic myths reveal at their core a sacrificial structure that involves the dissolution of the individual. We could even say that this underlying structure, with its constitutive irresolvable tension, generates all the elusiveness and all the ambiguities that characterise mythic narratives: proper names are multiplied for the same designations, temporality acquires fanciful shapes, good and evil interpenetrate.

The sacred boundlessness beyond individuation to which the victim is restored through ritual killing is the same unmasterable force that constitutes Nature's power.[8] At this point the aetiology of Greek myth (possibly the most influential body of myths in Western culture if we exclude Christianity) shows a kinship between the structure of sacrifice and mythic narrative: it is precisely in the

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[8] Yet the identification between sacredness and natural forces does not fully disclose the meaning of ritual or of its mythic elaborations, as Nietzsche points out: he qualifies as 'ill-advised [..] those who cannot deal with the magnificent, profound mythology of the Greeks until they have reduced it to the physical trivialities of sun, lighting, storm and mist which originally presumably gave rise to it' (Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic age of the Greeks*, trans. by Marianne Cowan. Chicago: Gateway. 1962, p. 30).

most ancient Greek stories that we find a clear identification between sacred powers and the forces of nature, between what is to be revered and what is to be feared. In the ancient world of the Titans the limitless powers of dynamicity are invested with the same cruelty as the divine demands of sacrificial expenditures. It will be only later that the Olympian cohort of deities will be less unambiguously identified with primary natural phenomena.[9]

The unmasterable forces of nature are eventually overthrown by the new gods: the Titans are defeated by the Olympians. Yet, just as sacrifice continues to constitute the centre of religious activity in classical Greece,[10] the sacrificial

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[9] Thus in Hesiod's account of the mythical origin, the primaeval gods are born out of Nature:

κλείετε δ' ἀθανάτων ἱερὸν γένος αἰὲν ἐόντων, /

οἳ γῆς ἐξεγένοντο καὶ οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος, /

νυκτός τε δνοφερῆς, οὓς θ' ἁλμυρὸς ἔτρεφε πόντος· (ΘΕΟΓΟΝΙΑ, 105-107) ['Sing ye [Muses] the holy race of the deathless gods which are for ever: even them that were born of Earth, and starry Heaven, and dusky Night, and those whom the briny Sea brought forth' (trans. by A. W. Mair in *Hesiod: The Poems and Fragments*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908, pp. 34-35)]. This and subsequent references to classical works that re-elaborate mythological stories draw on Robert Graves's account of sources for his *The Greek Myths* (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1992).

[10] 'The more elaborate Greek festivals were made up of a limited number of basic ritual acts: dances, musical and athletic contests, prayers and hyms, processions [...]. All these elements were

structure continues to pervade the objectified world of mythic narrative: after all, the Olympian deities are the direct descendants of the Titans; between unmasterability and objectification there is a relationship of kinship, in the strictest of senses. Mutual respect and mutual requirement arise from this relationship of engenderment and war. Nietzsche re-elaborates the terms of this dependence in his formulation of the opposition between the Apolline and Dionysiac forces. The fact that these categories are primarily aesthetic is not a restriction of their applicability, but a hint for an understanding of metaphysics' genealogy as an aesthetic distancing from the original sacredness of non-differentiation. Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, within a philosophical enquiry, re-engages in the inescapable interplay between sacredness and the aesthetic, as a first step for his critique of metaphysics. The origins of metaphysics, according to this position are precisely to be found in Socrates' sacrilegious attitude and in Plato's mistrust of myth. Plato's true metaphysical gesture is not the construction of what has been taken as an idealist ontology, but the philosophical secularisation of myth, its transformation into a discourse devoid of truth and moral value and therefore alien to the philosophical pursuit of wisdom. After Plato, myth becomes literature, or myth in our modern, pejorative sense of the term: a deceitful fiction. There are many features in the works of the literary writers before Plato that urge us to consider them as literature rather than myth: conscious development of literary techniques

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important, but the pivot of Greek ritual was undoubtedly animal sacrifice' (Jan N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion*, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 39-40).

and intensified awareness of the individual talent of the poet, for instance. Yet literature only acquires its entirely fictional dignity (or indignity) when it is opposed, by Plato, to the truthful discourse of philosophy. It is in this sense that we can say that literature begins at the same time as metaphysics,[11] in Plato's writings, and therefore it makes perfect sense that Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical attempts started with a re-elaboration of the aesthetic theory that the opposition of philosophy to literature entails.

However, it must be pointed out that the secularised version of myth that literature becomes after Plato does not always renounce its sacred origins. This is what makes Georges Bataille say that 'poetry is a sacrifice of words',[12] that is, that poetry recovers a sacredness even more original than that of myth. A literature of the crisis of Modernity, Modernist literature, suitably receives Bataille's dictum, disclosing in its very structure not only the mythical quality but the sacrificial renouncement of discourse that precedes it. Nietzsche's praise of ancient Greek

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[11] Whether Plato can be rightly regarded as the initiator of 'metaphysics', a term coined only after Aristotle, calls for extensive debate. We only hope that the sense of the term implied in the text appears consistent with our interpretation of Plato. For a discussion of the strangeness of metaphysics to the mind of the classical Greek, see Jaume Casals, *El Pou de la Paraula: Una Història de la Saviesa Grega* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1996), pp. 45-74.

[12] See Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 136. Below, in p. 149, we read: 'among various sacrifices, poetry is the only one whose fire we can maintain, renew.'

tragedy largely rests precisely on the mythical quality that Greek tragedy is alleged to contain,[13] even if tragedy had lost its truly religious character long before Plato's theoretical formulation. For René Girard, as for Bataille does modern literature, Greek tragedy goes even further, and its true power resides not only in its mythic elaborations, but in the subordination of myth to a destabilizing sacrificial structure.[14]

Nevertheless, to conceive of a continuity between sacredness and fiction we need to step outside the Platonic distinctions (we need to return to the times when myth was still not literature), and recover the notion of a *logos* that is not incompatible with the dynamicity of *physis*. According to such a notion, myth is not the deceitful fiction that Plato and our modernity take it to be: *mythos*, belonging to the domain of *legein*, is referred to as *hieros logos*, 'sacred reason', 'sacred speech'.[15] If the notion of the sacred is originally extracted from the

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[13] See chapter 1.

[14] See chapter 3.

[15] 'Even when, in the form of stories about the gods or heroes, the words transmit a strong religious charge, communicating to a group of initiates secret knowledge forbidden to the common crowd, *muthoi* can equally well be called *hieroi logoi*, sacred speeches' (Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, p. 204).

unmasterability of the forces of nature, of which the Titanic world is a first representation, then the mythic tales of the Olympian world *inherit* this quality, which is now made intelligible, systematic, discursive, 'logical'. Therefore, the first form of discursive intelligibility, in its being sacred, is not opposed to the ever-changing matter of the sensible world: it naturally arises from this world without imposition or rupture, and it allows for an understanding of reality without mediation. Before metaphysics and before literature, in the world of myth and of pre-Socratic philosophy, *logos* necessarily arises from *physis*, without discontinuity or abstraction: *logos* is a feature of *physis* itself, and intelligibility and reality are not yet dissociated. That lack of dissociation allows for a direct experience of sacredness by humans, but also for an exchange of categories between the human and the natural world: the source of value and systematicity is not the *nomos*, but the law of nature that nature itself produces, the universal intelligibility; yet this law speaks in Greek, through the tongue of the myth-makers. Conversely, the forces of *physis* acquire human form, and the unmasterability of sacred nature is encapsulated within human categories, up to and including the serenity of the Olympian gods, ancestors of the Greek people. This double movement engenders the ambiguity of myth (discursively ordered but arising from the sacredness of nature), and allows us to conceive of myth in the otherwise oximoronic terms of *sacred speech* or *sacred law*.

This joining of concepts and notions which we have learnt to treat separately recurs in Nietzsche's engagement with the world of ancient Greece, and from here it is extended to other spheres of his philosophy. The notion of 'universal will' that Nietzsche endorses in *The Birth of Tragedy*, inherited from Schopenhauer, presents this irreducibility to either human or natural components. For Nietzsche, as for Schopenhauer, the universal will is the ultimate reality,[16] but for Nietzsche it is not to be characterised by blindness and unpredictability; rather, he models this notion on the dynamicity of the human will, of which the Dionysiac discourse of music is a direct copy and the Apolline discourse of the visual arts a distorted reflection; it is for Nietzsche akin to the Greek *physis* in its inexhaustible dynamic power, forever creative, but also to the Greek *logos* in its purposiveness and its unavoidable reflection in the ordered world of phenomena.

Therefore, Nietzsche's aesthetic turn involves a borrowing of the absence of distinctions that characterised the ancient Greek conception of reality: there is a conflation of value and unmasterability, a dependence of systematicity upon excess; nature becomes anthropomorphised and the human becomes naturalised. It is in this sense that the notion of the universal will in *The Birth of Tragedy*, within aesthetic co-ordinates, can be said to prefigure the notion of the will to power: reality is in both cases characterised as excess with respect to itself, on the model of the inexhaustible natural forces of production and destruction; simultaneously, this

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[16] For a clarification of these notions, see above, 1.2.

boundless excessive power is characterised as will, and therefore modelled on human terms, assigned a purpose and an intelligibility. The notions of the universal will and of the will to power in Nietzsche, designed to dissolve the stasis of metaphysics, constitute a restitution of reason to its sacred origin (to its Natural origin), making it again possible to conceive of intelligibility as excess (to conceive of *hieroi logoi*), or of one as the precondition of the other.

The continuity between sacredness and its apprehension in the philosophy and literature of ancient mythic times has another correlate in the new treatment of myth that we find in literary Modernism. The sacredness of the unmasterable forces of nature,[17] as well as the human co-ordinates of understanding, are presented here in parallel to the Nietzschean surpassing of distinctions. Yet what we encounter in Modernist literature is not the positing of an ontological or anti-ontological category, but rather a literary unfolding that presupposes it. In the works of, say, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Thomas Mann, the world of nature and the world of subjectivity merge in a way that finds a true precedent only in the remote world of the *hieroi logoi*: subjectivity is not exterior to nature, and nature does not cease to acquire the epiphanic quality of what is subjectively meaningful. There is not a reflection between subject and world (at least not a simple one) nor a

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[17] That is, the primordial character of what inspires a primitive and reverential awe, in response to which sacrifice arises, according to Bataille, as seen in 3.1.

correspondence mediated by a third term (such as, for example, the individuals's inner world), as there was in the modern tradition: in Modernism there is a continuity of meaning. The waters of Cape Ann for the Eliot of 'The Dry Salvages', or the fragrance of Stephen's Green for the Joyce of *A Portrait of the Artist* cannot be dissociated from the quality of the subjective experiences themselves: they are inserted in a continuity of reality in which subjectivity is in the world as much as the world is epiphanic.

At a point when literature already has a long history as a secularised discourse, with no claims to the disclosure of ultimate reality, the mythic worlds of Modernist literature begin to speak the truth of their own fiction.[18] In two opposed instances, James Joyce opts for an insertion in a pagan tradition, while T. S. Eliot adheres to the Christian doctrine, but in both cases the re-creation of sacred worlds points to a convergence that is as relevant as the difference in the historical forms of the actualisation of these sacred worlds: Greek religion and Christian religion. Even if this convergence appears more clearly in the shared impulse of *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, both resting on the complex recovery of the structuring force of ancient myths, another point of contact can be found between *Four Quartets* and *A Portrait of the Artist*, at first sight not so much in a structural or thematic kinship, but in a shared distance from the confident intellectualism that *The Waste Land*

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[18] We return to the mythopoeic Modernist paradox, anticipated by Nietzsche: if truth is a fiction, then only a fiction which does not present itself as truth is true.

and *Ulysses* display, this time approaching,by contrast, a genuine appreciation of the sacred as not fully reducible to the parameters of the modern human intellect.[19]

And even if what they mainly share is an attitude of respect, springing from Eliot's Christian commitment in the one case and from Joyce's recalling of a rich childhood and adolescence in the other, *Four Quartets* and *A Portrait of the Artist* also share, if implicitly, an engagement with myth that is also thematic and structural. Stephen's story is made to correspond at crucial points, including the epigraph and the last line of the novel, with the story of Icarus' fall,[20] in his attempt

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[19] Within the contrast which I attempt to set up, the mythic power of the resonances of *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* is eclipsed by the detachment of intellectualism.

[20] This story is re-told in, among other places, Hyginus' fable XL: 'Daedalus pennas sibe et Icaro filio suo fecit et accommodauit, et inde auolarunt. Icarus altius uolans, a sole cera calefacta, decidit in mare quod ex eo Icarium pelagus est appellatum' (Hyginus, *Fabulae*, ed. by P. K. Marshall, Stuttgart and Leipzig: Teubner, 1993) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: 'rapidi uicina solis / mollit adoratas pennarum uincula, ceras; / tabuerant cerae: nudos quatit ille lacertos, / remigioque carens non ullas percipit auras, / oraque caerullea patrium clamantia nomen / excipiuntur aqua, quae nomen traxit ab illo' (VIII, 225-230) ['The scorching rays of the nearer sun softened the fragant wax which held his wings. The wax melted; his arms were bare as he beat them up and down, but, lacking wings, they took no hold in the air. His lips, calling to the last upon his father's name, were drowned in the dark blue sea, which took its name from him' (trans. by F. J. Miller. Loeb Classical Library, 1946, p.423)].

to escape from the labyrinth of Crete. In *Four Quartets*, clear traces of a mythology older than Christian re-elaborations are found in the earthy nature of the men of 'East Coker', which recalls the spontaneous emergence of the Pelasgian man out of the soil of Arcadia[21], and the pre-modern ideas of a sea that effectively surrounds us in 'The Dry Salvages', recalling the ancient imagery of Oceanus.[22]

The sacrificial structure that precedes mythical elaboration is also present: in the transfer of the sacrificial character of Icarus' fall to Stephen's, and in the centrality of the event of Christ's Passion for *Four Quartets*.

4.2. The Aesthetic of Myth

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[21] We read in Pausanias' quoting Asius: 'Αντίθεον δὲ Πελασγὸν ἐν ὑψικόμοισιν ὄρεσσι ΄ γαῖα μέλαιν' ἀνέδωκεν, ἵνα θνητῶν γένος εἴη. (book VIII, I, 4) ['The godlike Pelasgus on the wooded mountains / Black earth gave up, that the race of mortals might exist', in Pusanias, *Description of Greece*, trans. by W. H. S. Jones (Loeb Classical Library, 1933), p. 349].

[22] εἶμι γὰρ ὀψομένη πολυφόρβου πείρατα γαίης, ΄ Ὠκεανόν τε, θεῶν γένεσιν [...] ['I am going to the ends of the nourishing earth, to visit Ocean, the source of the gods' creating' (Homer, *Iliad*, XIV, 200-201 , trans. by Martin Hammond, London: Penguin, 1987, p. 248)].

Literature's dependence on mythic narratives is thematised by Nietzsche in the aesthetic theory that *The Birth of Tragedy* contains. For Nietzsche, it is the mythical quality of ancient Greek tragedy that secures its aesthetic success.[23] The perfect balance that Greek tragedy achieves is the same balance that we find in the mythic blending of objectification with a non-objectifiable ground. Nietzsche's aesthetic theory in *The Birth of Tragedy* continually rests on this opposition: that between the ungraspable space of dissolution of the Dionysiac impulse and the illusory boundaries that delimit individualities in the Apolline world. What appears to be the properly aesthetic in this opposition is the Apolline force, aligned with the qualities of visual perception, but its Dionysiac counterpart remains the force of the inescapable ground of darkness on which the Apolline rests, and it is only in the space of their interaction that the aesthetic takes place, as an impossible attempt to objectify, secularise and make visible a non-objectifiable ground whose sacred essence cannot but lend itself to a never fully achieved objectification in a perpetual tension that never reaches its end.

The Apolline character of objectification, opposed to the Dionysiac urge to be dissolved in the non-difference of the sacred primordial space, links the nature of theoretical activity to that of the visual and narrative arts. The kinship between 'theory' and 'theatre' (as well as that between theory and theatre) is not only the repetition of graphemes or sounds that recalls the conceptual closeness of their

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A Nietzsche's sustained praise of the mythic quality is found throughout The Birth of Tragedy

Greek origin:[24] it is also the fundamental link that allows us to consider theoretical activity as one of the manifestations of what Nietzsche defines as the Apolline impulse. A correlation between theory and the elements of visual perception has always pervaded the history of ideas, but in Nietzsche's formulation the kinship between philosophy and vision is characterised in aesthetic terms: because the clear definition of boundaries that we perceive in narrative and visual art becomes the paradigm of all seeing, the philosophical insight, as a mode of seeing, is essentially artistic in origin, and constitutes a manifestation of the Apolline aesthetic impulse.

The distinction between real and fictive objects is not important for Nietzsche's aesthetic theory: objects that can be visually apprehended are, precisely because of this, essentially fictive, artistically created, whether we normally consider them to be so or not; any object, by being an object, is already a fiction, an artistic construct that has the Apolline tendency towards individuation and clear boundaries as its source; the world itself cannot find a justification if it is not as an aesthetic phenomenon,[25] as a fictive show. Thus, the history of theory is for Nietzsche in some respect the theory of one of the modes of aesthetic seeing, and it does not make any difference that the objects of theory have always enjoyed a different, more 'truthful' status: their belonging to the realm of vision, understood as

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[24] In θεορειν, 'to behold'.

[25] See chapter 1, note 2.

the Apolline realm of illusion, assigns to them essentially the same fictitious status as it does to the works of the visual arts.

The privilege of aesthetics over any other kind of explanation results in a subversion of the traditional divisions between disciplines: thus philosophy originates as a form of Apolline activity, and philosophical writing shares its point of departure with literature, both being aesthetic forms of justification. Indeed Nietzsche characterises Socratism as a diseased form of the Apolline impulse, as an aesthetic objectifying force that has forgotten to pay respect to the original ground of non-objectification. In this sense Socrates is for Nietzsche the first meta*physical* philosopher, the first one who fails to acknowledge the sacred character of *physis* (non-objectifiable dynamicity), and therefore, rightly condemned for his impiety by the political authorities of the time. It took only the hand of Plato to counteract this sentence, and, by writing, to leave the path open for commentators to draw on the original sacrilege that distorts the dynamic of myth, misuses the Apolline force and results in two secularised discourses (philosophy and literature) instead of the original discourses charged with sacredness.[26]

Philosophy and literature remain above all after Plato, in Nietzsche's eyes, modes of representation, modes of creating a world of visible or intelligible objects.

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[26] Notice that I say 'commentators': the always ambiguous position of 'the divine Plato' in respect to myth is explored again a little below.

However, in their distance from the original unity of myth, they have lost their sacred dimension, their respect for the world of non-individuation. Thus philosophy assigns the highest value to objectivity, to entities as they are, forgetting about the aesthetic precariousness of any process of individuation; thus literature in its turn deprives its constructs of any connection with the sacred ground which manifests through its objects. Historical necessity is not a satisfactory explanation for the origins of philosophy and literature (as we understand them today) out of the secularisation of myth. Nietzsche himself proves this point when he engages in a philosophical activity that remains such for him but that takes a fundamental distance from the immediate tradition. The only precursors in this way of philosophizing who Nietzsche acknowledges throughout all his work are the pre-Socratic philosophers. They prove that it was possible to do philosophy and at the same time to keep a respect for the sacred ground of non-objectification: they prove that it was possible to do philosophy without secularizing myth, indeed in accordance with myth. If we bring to mind Heraclitus' engagement with the explanation of a *physis* whose *logos* does not renounce its ever-changing nature, or the mythical tone of Parmenides' encounter with the goddess of truth, the contrast with the descendants of Platonism up to Nietzsche's philosophy becomes acute. It may also be said that even more ungraspable for us, but no less certain, was the different quality of Greek literature before the invention of metaphysics. We could even say that literature could only begin to cease to be a ritual discourse after this invention.

But this event, what we take to be the invention of metaphysics, is it not itself charged with the ambiguity of myth? Is this origin of the secular not itself a mythical origin, an ideal point in a narrative of sweet deception? The puzzling ambiguity of Plato's gestures is well known, and only his commentators could build a tradition. Over the shadow of a fictional Socrates, Plato inaugurates philosophy as a mode of representation without a sacred dimension: philosophy is a longing for the true world because it is itself removed from that true world; the dialectical method can restore us to unity precisely because it starts from the coldness and detachment that is alien to ritual and myth. Against the deceptive stories of the myth-makers, the sobriety of dialectical reason; against the blind ecstasy of the Orphic celebrants, the illuminating power of philosophical *logos*; myths can only be subordinated to our pursuit of truth, and the madness of the inspired poet or the enraptured celebrant does not grant the wisdom of philosophical madness as an insight at the end of a formalisable dialectical process.

However, Plato reveals himself in his writings as a great myth-maker: the quality and influence of some o Plato's myths, such as the myth of creation in *Timaeus* or that of the winged chariot in *Phaedrus* could even be compared to that of the most illustrious sources of our reception of ancient Greek myths. Plato's own claim that his myths are only didactic tools and that they are always subordinated to a dialectical chain of reasoning becomes weak against the unsurmountable

evidence of their force and extension within the dialogues; force and extension that in purely textual terms would eclipse the intentions of their author, were his claims more trustworthy than the rhetorical mechanisms of a very shrewd sophist.

Therefore, the philosopher who discredits the value of myth is himself a consummate myth-maker. Moreover, it is also Plato, a thwarted tragedian and a skilful poet, who bans poets from his ideal republic. He does so in the name of truth,[27] although some argue that there is only personal frustration behind this gesture. Regardless of Plato's intentions, the dynamic of subsequent interpretation required this ambiguous anti-poetic and anti-mythic gesture. For the history of metaphysics to be inaugurated, and for it to have a secure origin, myth and sacred poetry had to be condemned, and they had to be condemned by an ambiguous gesture that is itself mythical and undecidable in character.

Ultimately the theory of aesthetic representation that lies behind Plato's dismissal of poetry turns against itself . The characterisation of the reality of the Forms as a world of reference for ours borrows the secularizing power from the Apolline tendency of visual representation; through this move truth wants to establish itself as the only acceptable mode of reflection, of representation of the

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[27] Lacoue-Labarthe points out that Plato carries out an elucidation of mimesis only after having produced an account of truth in his *Republic* (see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. by Christopher Fynsk, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 77).

real. Nevertheless, by remaining within the co-ordinates of an aesthetic structure, this representational inauguration of the metaphysical world contains its own failure: it cannot help denouncing its dependence on an non-representable Dionysiac ground whose reality is prior to that which can be represented, just as Plato cannot help disclosing his abilities as a myth-maker and a poet.

Nietzsche's aesthetic theory is the reflection, attempting to close a metaphysical circle of centuries, of Plato's reduction of philosophy to an aesthetic mode of representation, a reduction itself inscribed in the tension between aesthetics and its impossibility, and therefore announcing the sterility of its claims. To the extent to which it announces its failure by resort to inscription in an aesthetic theory and practice, Plato's philosophy is a clear precedent of Nietzsche's. Not only because it *contains* a mythical dimension irreducible to the parameters of demonstrative rationality, but also because its own dialectical concepts prefigure a theory of representation that *The Birth of Tragedy* only re-elaborates.

Plato's theory of representation remains as mythical as Nietzsche's theory of aesthetic interplay between Apollo and Dionysus. He may not use Olympian deities to characterise his concepts, but the terms of his theory recall both the visual character of Apolline myth and the ecstatic nature of Dionysiac ritual. The only dignity that our world acquires in relation to the reality of the world of Forms is

such by virtue of our world's *imitation* (*mimesis*) of and *participation* [28] (*methexis*) in the world of Forms. The imagery of lighting and reflection dominates Plato's construction of his theory[29], and on the model of a copy by reflection, an imitation (*mimesis*) through light, the status of our degraded world is explained. Nevertheless, the objects of our sensible world also *participate* in the truth of the Forms, and this is how they allow for a philosophical movement that otherwise would have needed the mediation of a third term. A relation of participation is the very opposite of imitation, since the very concept of miming or reflecting requires a clear division between two realms; yet Plato seems to have no problem in aligning

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[28] The qualification of the relationship between the sensible world and the world of Forms is subjected to revision in *Parmenides* and *Sophist* 266d-268c, but the duplicity of this relationship seems to remain despite the attempts at simplification or reduction of one to the other:

μάλιστα ἔμοιγε καταφαίνεται ὧδε ἔχειν . τὰ μὲν εἴδη ταῦτα ὥσπερ
παραδείγματα ἑστάναι ἔν τῇ φύσει, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα τούτοις ἐοικέναι καὶ εἶναι
ὁμοιώματα. καὶ ἡ μέθεξις αὕτη τοῖς ἄλλοις γίγνεσθαι τῶν εἰδῶν
οὐκ ἄλλη τις ἢ εἰκασθῆναι αὐτοῖς

(132d) [[...] I think the most like likely view is [Socrates said], that these ideas exist in nature as patterns, and the other things resemble them and are imitations of them; their *participation* in ideas is assimilation to them, that and nothing else (trans. by H. N. Fowler, Loeb Classical Library, 1926, pp. 219-221)].

[29] As paradigmatically shown in the influential passage in *Republic* which contains the myth of the cave (*Rep.*, 506e-520d).

these two notions, as if they were in fact complementary to one another; as if the blurring of boundaries modelled on the ritual loss of individuality were the other side of the presentation of clearly defined objects modelled on narrative and visual art.

Thus at the very core of Plato's theory of Forms, and not only in the periphery that his own mythical narratives are, the aesthetic of reflection and dissolution, proper to myth and ritual, is present in a way that clearly prefigures Nietzsche's account of aesthetic forces in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The secularizing impulse towards mythic discourse (the desire for clarity, objectification and individuation that prompts the transformation of the ritual into myth, as well as Plato's thirst for knowledge —philosophy proper—), is already intertwined in Plato's text with the origin that it denies and on which it depends: with the sacred sphere of non-difference, participation and communion. From this perspective, Plato's philosophy is a discourse of respect for the sacred sphere, in the sense in which Nietzsche's is and Socrates' wasn't. The disavowal of the mythical dimension of philosophy finds in Plato its expression only at the expense of being itself integrated in a mythic texture. Similarly, Nietzsche's attempt at the closure of the tradition that Plato inaugurates constitutes again a mythic discourse: the origin and the closure mirror each other, resting on an aesthetic theory as the ground for an ontology *and* its dismantling, and sharing the textual qualities of myth in their emphasis on the truth of fiction.

4.3. The Original Mimesis

Just as Plato's notion of mimesis appears counterbalanced by the notion of participation that it itself seems to require, Nietzsche's understanding of the structure of imitation incorporates the terms that the logic of this structure would seem to exclude. Imitative art is for Nietzsche part of a continuum with that which it imitates: the visual arts do not imitate nature, but belong themselves to nature's tendency towards imitation.[30] The Apolline delight in the clarity of well-defined forms does not confront a natural world whose non-objectifiable character is brought into presence: the Apolline force belongs itself to nature's logic of manifestation, just as the Greek *physis* could not but *appear* through a *logos* that was proper to it. Although the relationship between these two notions is not simple, we can legitimately assume that for pre-Socratic Greece the intelligibility of the

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[30] For Nietzsche the Apolline imitative and reflective force is also part of Nature's artistic urges: 'we have so far considered the Apolline, and its opposite, the Dionysiac, as artistic powers which spring from nature itself, *without the mediation of the human artist*' (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 18).

natural world (of the *physis*) rested on a law or a word (*logos*) which was itself continuous with and not dissociated from Nature. Similarly, the continuity between the primal non-differentiated reality and its distension in the illusions[31] of discrete forms grounds the mutual requirement between the Apolline and Dionysiac impulses which is needed for a consistent interpretation of *The Birth of Tragedy*. The manifestation of ultimate, non-objectifiable reality can only happen in the form of illusions; yet it belongs to the very essence of reality to manifest through illusions, and therefore the illusions themselves are not fully dissociated from the realm of non-differentiation from which they spring.

One way of interpreting this continuity, this complex understanding of mimesis that was already prefigured in Plato, is to privilege the fictive aspect of this mimesis: from this standpoint, mimesis would be already at the origin, indistinguishable from its real model.[32] Mimesis would precede and encompass

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[31] 'Illusion' here need not carry (as it often does not in Nietzsche) pejorative connotations. Since Nietzsche's philosophy has ultimately an aesthetic bias, 'illusion' has the playful and positive value of what it is artistically produced. Against the expectations of those claiming the objectivity of the real, Nietzsche celebrates the truth of fiction, of illusion, the positive value of what for others is cause of deceit and dispair.

[32] See Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, pp. 112-113: 'would mimesis [...] not require precisely a rethinking of representation? That is, prior to the classical "theoretical" representation (to the dualism of the present and the represented), a thought of representation in which the *re-* of

representation, as a doubling that presupposes no original, as an illusion that was always there from the beginning. This is a typically post-structuralist interpretation of Nietzsche's aesthetics, indulging in the playful possibilities of a purely narrative conception of reality. For this theoretical stance the game of reflection has always already taken place, the original oneness is already contaminated by the force of duplication and repetition. This involves a certain privileging of Apolline elements that does not seem entirely legitimate according to Nietzsche's theory: even if non-objectifiable reality is from the beginning inserted in a process of repetition, doubling, miming and reflection, for the very process to remain active there has to be room for conceiving of an essential irreducibility of non-difference to the difference of plural narratives. For myth to remain myth, its sacred value has to be irreducible to its fictive character; analogically, for philosophy to remain faithful to its mythic origin, its claims to truth have to be compatible with its narrative structure. A purely narrative view of reality is thus not respectful of the sacred quality of myth, and establishes a secularised literature as its substitute, just as the modern metaphysical tradition established a secularised philosophy. The notion of an all-encompassing mimesis that contains the actuality of events and objects as

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repetition would govern — and carry away — any presentational value [...?]'; and below, p. 117: 'there is only one remedy against representation, infinitely precarious, dangerous and unstable: representation itself. And this is also why ritualization and dramatization — the tragicomedy of sacrifice and of the spectacle — never end. To postulate that there is, prior to religious or artistic repetition, a real violence, a true murder, a "cruelty" — and in fact what would prohibit this? — does not change a thing'.

well as their representation breaks the tension that Nietzsche establishes between Dionysiac non-differentiation and Apolline difference, and therefore results in another secularised discourse, in another 'disease of the Apolline', comparable to Socrates' impiety.

Only a mythic discourse that respects its sacred dimension can provide us with a satisfactory notion of objectivity: one that acknowledges its own fictive and illusory character and simultaneously presupposes a real non-objectifiable ground as its source. For this mythic stance the process of objectification, the fictive and narrative positing of boundaries, is still indissociable from the ultimate nature of reality, but does not exhaust it. As in the ancient notion of a nature that remains perpetually creative behind its logical objectifications, for mythic discourse the fictive character of intelligibility is compatible with an access to the ultimate reality: the actuality of events and the artistic quality of our representations remain distinct and yet part of a continuum. In this respect the philosophy of the pre-Socratics, the philosophy of Nietzsche and the literature of Modernism are clear examples of an engagement with this mythical stance. The forms of rationality of the first philosophers are compatible with Greek religion; Nietzsche's aesthetic and anti-metaphysical moves restore a respect for non-objectification; Modernist fictions incorporate the theme and the texture of myth as a means to surpass the limitations of an art with no claims to truth or to the experience of sacredness.[33]

While the thematic components are clearer in works such as *Ulysses* or *The Waste Land*, a deeper engagement with the forms of knowledge proper to mythic discourse is achieved in those instances where the obviousness of the thematic material leaves way for the ritual and sacrificial structure that myths entail and (fail to) objectify. The tragic death of Icarus at the background of *A Portrait of the Artist*, the pervasiveness of the ritual of the Eucharist both there and in *Four Quartets*, the ritual dances of fertility and the archaic flavour of Christian imagery in the latter, all point to an inner appropriation of the mythic force by the texts which makes the Modernist use of myth essentially different from an external literary appropriation of its narrative exuberance. In this sense the de-secularisation of philosophy that Nietzsche attempts finds a direct correlate in the re-enchantment of the literary world that Modernist writing carries out.

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[33] It can be argued that the Romantics attempted exactly the same surpassing: the Jena Romantics (Schlegel, Novalis, Schelling, etc) wanted to create a 'new mythology', but it is precisely this intentionality what exposes their different co-ordinates of thought in respect to Modernism: for the Modernists myth is all-pervasive, is already here, and only has to be allowed to speak.

5. Eliot and Joyce: A Literary Rendering of Sacredness

James Joyce and T. S. Eliot enjoy a solid position among the Modernist writers, beyond disputes about their filiation or their significance. Their works take part, in a more or less explicit manner, in the denouncement of what was perceived early in this century as a particular crisis of the spirit of the Western world. The terms in which this crisis is sensed (or through which it is ignored) can be argued to have found a precedent theoretical articulation in Nietzsche's philosophy.[1] In particular, the exploration of the mutual implication of the sacred and the aesthetic in *The Birth of Tragedy* provides an enlightening background for understanding the modernists' concern with the desacralisation of the modern world.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (hereafter referred to as *A Portrait of the Artist*) and *Four Quartets*, as canonical works within the Modernist corpus, stand in a relation of dissymmetry to each other, since they stand, respectively, for the young Joyce and the mature Eliot, or, more precisely,

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[1] However, T. S. Eliot would have not acknowledged the existence of such a precedent, since his views on Nietzsche reflect, in a few scattered allusions, the spirit of a negative valuation of him as a thinker. Most notably and explicitly, in his review of A. Wolf's on Nietzsche, Eliot starts his text with the celebrated remark: 'Nietzsche is one of those writers whose philosophy evaporates when detached from its literary qualities, and whose literature owes its charm not alone to the personality and wisdom of the man, but to a claim to scientific truth' (T. S. Eliot, 'Review of *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, by A. Wolf', in *International Journal of Ethics*, no. 26, April 1916, pp. 426-27).

for an early and a late stage in the coherent literary development of each other's œuvre. Nevertheless, both of them contain a complex restatement of the link between the sacred and the aesthetic, and to the extent to which this restatement is achieved, both of them can be taken as points of reference for previous or further developments within the series of each author's works.

5.1. Religion and Art

The level at which sacredness and the aesthetic first appear linked in these texts is that of the association of religion with art in a way analogous to Nietzsche's appropriation of Olympian deities for his aesthetic theory. Stephen, the protagonist of *A Portrait of the Artist* as well as Joyce's instrument for self-portrayal, sketches his aesthetic theory mainly in relation to the scholastic thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, and his journey of self-realisation towards the independence of the artistic creator includes his Catholic education as a fundamental stage.

The young Stephen is aware of the limitations that his religious education imposes on his artistic impulses:

> it wounded him to think that he would never be but a shy guest at the feast of the world's culture and that the monkish learning, in terms of which he was striving to forge out an aesthetic philosophy, was held no

> higher by the age he lived in than the subtle and curious jargons of heraldry and falconry.[2]

However, even if his theory had to rely on 'only a garner of slender sentences from Aristotle's poetics and psychology and a *Synopsis Philosophiæ Scholasticæ ad mentem divi Thomæ*',[3] the limitations of his learning allowed him a great intensity of experience:

> his thinking was a dusk of doubt and selfmistrust lit up at moments by the highlights of intuition, but lightings of so clear a splendour that in those moments the world perished about his feet as if it had been fireconsumed: and thereafter his tongue grew heavy and he met the eyes of others with unanswering eyes for he felt that the spirit of beauty had folded him round like a mantle and that in revery at least he had been acquainted with nobility.[4]

Here appears an instance of a recurrent contrast, that in its most general formulation is the contrast between Stephen's inherited religious tradition and a personal experience that he seeks to express in art. The mixture of mistrust and intuition, of limitation and illumination that arises from Stephen's approach to Thomism, already points to a two-way relationship in *A Portrait of the Artist*,

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[2] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. S. Deane (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 194.

[3] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 191.

[4] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 191.

that here appears as that between art and religion within the attempted exposition of an artistic theory. It is through the theologically charged ideas of St Thomas Aquinas, and his appropriation of Aristotle, that Stephen tries to ground his experience of art.

Stephen makes, as Nietzsche does, an association between the tragic, the dramatic and the aesthetic. He easily slides from the first term to the last, suggesting a continuity in which the tragic expresses the core or the essence of the dramatic, and this in turn the essence of the aesthetic.[5] *The Birth of Tragedy* also implicitly assumed tragic drama to be a centre in relation to which other artistic manifestations were defined. Nevertheless, the development of Stephen's theory, apart from this point, stands in clear disagreement with Nietzsche's account of the aesthetic; Stephen still owes too much to an unrevised tradition that Nietzsche criticises, a tradition that understands art through emotions and Greek tragedy through Aristotelian catharsis:

> the grave events are supposed to be leading pity and terror inexorably towards the relief of discharge; now we are supposed to feel elevated and inspired by the triumph of good and noble principles, by the sacrifice of the hero in the interest of a moral view of the world [...]. Anyone who still speaks only in terms of those vicarious non-aesthetic effects, who does not feel elevated above the pathological and moral process, should despair of his aesthetic nature.[6]

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[5] See Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 222.

[6] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 107.

In contrast, Joyce lets Stephen provide definitions of pity and terror as aesthetic emotions; these emotions are static, for art is for Stephen essentially stasis, detached from the kinetic emotions of loathing and desire:

> the tragic emotion,in fact, is a face looking two ways: towards terror and towards pity [...]. The feelings excited by improper art are kinetic, desire or loathing. Desire urges us to possess, to go to something; loathing urges us to abandon, to go from something. These are kinetic emotions. The arts which excite them, pornographical or didactic, are therefore improper arts. The aesthetic emotions (I use the general term) is therefore static. The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing.[7]

In this respect, Stephen subscribes to Nietzsche's view of the contemplative nature of artistic apprehension, at this stage under the influence of Schopenhauer and in accord with a tradition that stems from Kant's views on the aesthetic. Nevertheless, Stephen's account differs radically from Nietzsche's: Stephen still remains within a conception of the will as an individual will, and does not make the static depend upon the impersonality of a universal flux, as Nietzsche does. Since for Stephen willing belongs only to the realm of the individual, the static quality that art calls for can only be a counterpart of the so-called kinetic emotions, and therefore remain itself within the individual realm. For Nietzsche, on the contrary, the will is universal, and aesthetic apprehension involves a recognition of the illusoriness of individuality

(of the individual will, or Stephen's 'kinetic emotions'): aesthetic experience is also for Nietzsche a denial of this individual will, but only in order to surpass it and embrace the dynamicity of the flux of reality that constitutes the ground of artistic manifestation; stasis becomes then impersonal dynamism, and contemplation becomes absence of individual willing. By modifying the Schopenhauerian notion of the universal will (a blind force devoid of purpose or value), Nietzsche bestows a new meaning on the concept of aesthetic apprehension as a will-less state: an experience does not have to renounce dynamicity to be aesthetic; it has to renounce selfhood. Emotion, even static emotion, is essentially alien to aesthetic experience; at the same time, such an experience involves the impersonality of a universal willing.

The Birth of Tragedy had already denounced the surrender of art to emotions in the tragedies of Euripides, that Nietzsche saw as an imperfect affirmation of the Apolline impulse, since in them the Apolline stood dissociated from its Dionysiac counterpart, that is to say, from the loss of the illusory boundaries of individual emotion. An analogous tendency presides over Stephen's speech, when he speaks for a tradition that describes art through the Apolline concepts of form, rhythm and harmony of beauty:

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[7] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 222.

> rhythm, said Stephen, is the first formal esthetic relation of part to part in any esthetic whole or of an esthetic whole to its part or parts or of any part to the esthetic whole of which it is a part.[8]

This concern with measure, form and proportion also pervades the following passage, in which Stephen discusses the phases of artistic apprehension according to Aquinas.[9] Yet a clearer affirmation of a distance from Nietzschean aesthetics is Stephen's acknowledgement of a subordination of beauty to truth, in an explicit validation of the Socratic turn that Plato re-elaborates and Nietzsche condemns:

> Plato, I believe, said that beauty is the splendour of truth. I don't think that it has a meaning but the true and the beautiful are akin. Truth is beheld by the intellect which is appeased by the most satisfying relations of the intelligible: beauty is beheld by the imagination which is appeased by the most satisfying relations of the sensible.[10]

Nietzsche not only had denied such a kinship between truth and beauty, but also had established the will to truth as the enemy of artistic creation: the aesthetic Socratism that held that 'to be beautiful everything must be first intelligible'[11] was to be blamed for the death of Greek tragedy. This monstrous deformation of

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[8] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 223.

[9] See Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 229-33.

[10] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 225.

[11] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 62.

the Apolline spirit that is the Socratic will to truth was also behind all the forces of anti-aesthetic character.

An even starker contrast between Joyce's recreation of Stephen's ideas on art and the aesthetic theory of *The Birth of Tragedy* arises when Stephen invokes Aristotle's formulation of the principle of non-contradiction in the course of his exposition:

> Aristotle's entire system of philosophy rests upon his book of psychology [*Metaphysics*, book Γ] and that, I think, rests on his statement that the same attribute cannot at the same time and in the same connection belong to and not to belong to the same subject.[12]

Stephen's idea of the kinship between beauty and truth has led him to the statement about the non-contradictory nature of the latter. In contrast,

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[12] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 225. My addition. On the principle of non-contradiction as the dubious foundation of thought for Nietzsche, and its implications for aesthetics in a godless world, see Massimo Riva, '1888-1988: Some Remarks on Nihilism and Secularisation', in *History of European Ideas*, Vol. II, 1989, pp. 979-88. There we read: 'In the drafts for Nietzsche's first book, error is philosophically unveiled as the presupposition of thought. The principle of (non) contradiction is consequently 'destroyed' as the foundation of thought (and therefore of error). All this, stress Colli and Montinari, is written without the help of an artistic lie — that is, it must be taken at face-value. The paradoxical aspect of it has nothing to do with rhetoric, buth with knowledge, *and truth*. Yet, philosopher and artist are inseparable in Nietzsche' (p. 980).

Nietzsche's valuation of the will to truth as a negative non-artistic impulse led him to affirm the contradictory character of artistic truth when glimpsed in a Dionysiac state:

> the individual, with all his restraints and moderations, was submerged in the self-oblivion of the Dionysiac state and forgot the Apolline dictates. *Excess* was revealed as truth, contradiction [...].[13]

Therefore, Stephen's emphasis on the static and reliance on the Apolline concern with form (ultimately forcing him to embrace a certain aesthetic Socratism), distances his theory from Nietzsche's. At this level, *A Portrait of the Artist* establishes a relationship that stands still as an index, within which the articulation of the sacred and the aesthetic finds no comfortable explanation. Yet this connection between Christian scholastic thought and aesthetic theory already points to further developments to be found at other levels of the novel.

Another instance of the connection between religion and art in *A Portrait of the Artist* is the fundamental part that Stephen's Catholic education plays in his journey towards artistic self-realisation. Stephen's perception of his Jesuit educators is, from his early years, linked to the feeling of isolation that keeps him away from his schoolmates and from society at large: religion cannot give him comfort, because it is in accord with the society from which he feels

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[13] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 27.

excluded. Already in his second school, Stephen feels an essential detachment from others:

> the noise of children at play annoyed him and their silly voices made him feel, even more keenly than he had felt at Clongowes, that he was different from others. He did not want to play. He wanted to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld.[14]

And this aloofness is later openly related to a conscious rejection of the social order, to which religion stands attached as another obstacle to the development of Stephen's artistic spirit:

> his destiny was to be elusive of social or religious orders. The wisdom of the priest's appeal did not touch him to the quick. He was destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world.[15]

Stephen's relation with religion adopts then the form of an opposition, as if his artistic aspiration necessarily implied a retreat to his selfhood, away from the mendacity of society and the religion that ties it together. In view of this opposition, Stephen's is the journey of the modern hero in search of meaning within himself, at a time when the enchantment of the external world has already altogether disappeared as the result of a long process of displacement of

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[14] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 67.

[15] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p.175.

the sacred from the whole to the individual. Hence Maurice Beebe's remark that 'one reason why the *Portrait* still seems revolutionary to the young is that it argues for the necessary alienation of the artist from God, home and country'.[16] Indeed, Stephen's rebellious gesture, refusing to make his Easter duty, is supported by a statement ('I will not serve'[17]) that would fit well into a Nietzschean attitude of praise of art and contempt for the slavish ideology embodied in Christian religion. Nevertheless, this matter is far from simple, and just as Nietzsche cannot but acknowledge the Christian inspiration of an aesthetic achievement such as 'the ineffably sublime and sacred music of Palestrina',[18] Stephen's relation to Catholicism is not only that presupposed by his opposition: it implies a further pervasion that the abundance of religious references throughout the novel is witness to. Thus Cranly, one of Stephen's friends, points out: 'it is a curious thing [...] how your mind is supersaturated with the religion in which you say you disbelieve'.[19] The persistence of religion in the story, in the form of Stephen's experiences at home and at school, as in the form of Stephen's intellectual development, advances a first hint for an exploration of Joyce's literary account of aesthetic sacredness.

Similarly, T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* signal an articulation of art and religion through the introduction of explicit Christian references within the

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[16] Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (New York University Press, 1964), p. 260.

[17] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 260. See also p. 126.

[18] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 89.

poems: the imagery of the lyrical enquiry that *Four Quartets* constitute is intertwined with veiled references to Christian dogma. Thus, the second part of 'The Dry Salvages' includes among its images that of an annunciation:

> Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage,
> The prayer of the bone on the beach, the unprayable
> Prayer at the calamitous annunciation?[20]

persisting below in

> The silent listening to the undeniable
> Clamour of the bell of the last annunciation

and further below in an explicit reference to the Annunciation of the angel to the Virgin Mary:

> Only the hardly, barely prayable
> Prayer of the one Annunciation.

Throughout the passage, the religious atmosphere is built by resort to other terms that carry related suggestions: 'prayer', 'bell'. Such imagery returns in part IV of the same poem, with further references to Mary, the 'Queen of Heaven':

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[19] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 261.

[20] Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Four Quartets*, in *Collected Poems 1909 - 1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 207.

Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory

Pray for all those who are in ships,—[21]

Prayer and bell return, this time with the

sound of the sea bell's

Perpetual angelus.[22]

The experience of time is a central concern in *Four Quartets*, and at the end of 'The Dry Salvages', the third of the poems, a resolution is offered that puts an end to a quest that persisted in the text up to this point: the mystery of time, the paradoxes of eternity and succession, are to be apprehended within the limits of religious life:

But to apprehend

The point of intersection of the timeless

With time, is an occupation for the saint.[23]

A little below, this point is revealed as the mystery of Incarnation:

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

Here the impossible union

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[21] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 211.

[22] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 212.

[23] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 212.

Of spheres of existence is actual,

Here the past and future

Are conquered, and reconciled,

Where action were otherwise movement

Of that which is only moved

And has in it no source of movement.[24]

Thus the Christian mystery provides meaning to the experience of time, just as it enlightens philosophy when accommodating the terms of the Aristotelian conception of God and the earthly that these last lines evoke. A survey of Eliot's *Four Quartets* promptly qualifies them as religious poetry, and yet the kind of relationship between religion and art present here is not that found in the Metaphysical poets or in the tradition of religious poetry, because, as in *A Portrait of the Artist*, there seems to be a level at which religion and art interact regardless of dogma, creed or doctrine, signalling to a very particular meeting point.

5.2. From Doctrine to Sacredness: Sensuousness and Sacrifice

The use of religious imagery, this time not in opposition to, but in accord with, the artistic purpose of the text, is not in itself enough to render clear Eliot's

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[24] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 213

engagement with a sacred understanding of the aesthetic. The religious references, in the texts by both Eliot and Joyce, have a further dimension that confers on the texts a texture of sacredness; their force lies not so much in their doctrinal content as in their ability to be reconciled with a certain sensuousness. To the extent to which the references pointed out become significant, we move from the opposition between art and religion to the interplay between sacredness and the aesthetic.

The streams of consciousness of Stephen as a child mingle his first religious thoughts and experiences with his deep awareness of a world of sensations. When thinking of the day of his first holy communion, the effect of this mixture in his mind is the enhancement of the immediate character of the ritual, providing a contact with transcendence as a continuity sprung from physical sensations: Stephen's reverential awe is very much in connection with the contrast between darkness and flashing gold in the tabernacle of the altar; the sin of touching it, the smell of the incense, the scraping of pens, the smell of the wine and the sickish feeling that raised in him, all these sensations are evoked by Stephen in connection with the ritual of his first communion, as part of his personal experience of transcendence. The holy bread and wine do not prompt him to reflection, but to evoking aestheticised images and bodily responses:

> the world was beautiful: wine. It made you think of dark purple because the grapes were dark purple that grew in Greece outside houses like

> white temples. But the faint smell of the rector's breath had made him feel a sick feeling on the morning of his first communion.[25]

It is not only the mind of the child Stephen, unable to discriminate, that approaches religion through a delight in the temporal world: later in the novel, the encounter between Stephen and a prostitute, as the climax of a sensual awakening to the world, is preluded by the comparison with the vision of sacred and ancient rites:

> the yellow gasflames arose before his troubled vision against the vapoury sky, burning as if before an altar. Before the doors and in the lighted halls groups were gathered arrayed as for some rite. He was in another world: he had awakened from a slumber of centuries.[26]

Even Stephen's later repentance resorts to a sensuous delight in appearances and devotional gestures, just as his previous surrender to the call of the flesh had had the character of a sacred experience. Now

> life became a divine gift for every moment and sensation of which, were it even the sight of a single leaf hanging on the twig of a tree, his soul should praise and thank the Giver [...]. The attitude of rapture in sacred art, the raised and parted hands, the parted lips and eyes as of

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[25] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 47.

[26] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 107.

> one about to swoon, became for him an image of the soul in prayer, humiliated and faint before her Creator.[27]

Likewise, his attempt at self-mortification has the effect of an intensified awareness of his senses. And when Stephen's piety fades away, the choice between priesthood and freedom with which he is confronted states most clearly how his aesthetic ambitions were rooted in the sacredness of his religious past. What flatters Stephen in the possibility of becoming a priest is not only the dark powers with which he would be invested; it is also the collection of aesthetic gestures that his mind evokes in relation to priesthood and its offices:

> [...]entering a confessional swiftly, ascending the altarsteps, incensing, genuflecting, accomplishing the vague acts of priesthood which pleased him by reason of their semblance of reality and of their distance from it.[28]

Religion is at last revealed for Stephen as essentially sacrificial and, as such, indissociable from the rituals of representation and repetition. The sacrificial rites of ancient religions involved an identification with the death of the victim that could be tolerated only as part of a representational structure that was periodically re-enacted. The mythical texture of ancient Greek tragedy retains the sacrificial mechanisms in its treatment of the heroic figures, and for Nietzsche the denial of the objective qualities of the hero, within a theatrical

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[27] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 162.

[28] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 171.

structure of representation, allowed the Greeks both to exorcise and to glimpse into Dionysiac reality. Now Stephen evokes the plastic nature of the Catholic rites, longing

> for the minor sacred offices, to be vested with the tunicle of subdeacon at high mass, to stand aloof from the altar, forgotten by the people, his shoulders covered with a humeral veil, holding the paten within its folds, or, when the sacrifice had been accomplished, to stand as deacon in a dalmatic cloth of gold [...]. In vague sacrificial or sacramental acts alone his will seemed drawn to go forth to encounter reality.[29]

After this awareness, it seems only proper that Stephen, when already determined to stay detached from his past, sees himself as 'a priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of ever-living life',[30] a formulation that finally brings together in explicit manner the two poles of Stephen's experience. Priesthood and imagination, aesthetic radiance of life and the sacred power of the artistic creator are blended precisely within the imagery of Eucharist, since this sacrament, as a sacrifice re-enacted in ritual repetition, stands at one of the points of intersection between the sacred and the aesthetic.

The imagery of *Four Quartets* is also at times evocative of this meeting. There are passages where the Christian references belong to a context that

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[29] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 172.

[30] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 240.

suggests a deeper meaning for the crude realities of the earthly world, bringing us back to a ritual conception of Christianity, understanding spiritual damnation in terms of bodily evils. Thus, in 'East Coker', IV:

> Our only health is the disease
> If we obey the dying nurse
> Whose constant care is not to please
> But to remind of our, and Adam's curse,
> And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse.[31]

Purgatorial fire has both the sensuous qualities of the terrible and the beautiful, and Christ's passion has the reality of an intoxicating sacrifice:

> If to be warmed, then I must freeze
> And quake in frigid purgatorial fires
> Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars.
>
> The dripping blood our only drink,
> The bloody flesh our only food:
> In spite of which we like to think
> That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood —
> Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good.[32]

Some critics react adversely to this sacrificial vision of Christianity:

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[31] Eliot, 'East Coker' IV, in *Collected Poems*, pp. 201-2.

[32] Eliot, 'East Coker' IV, in *Collected poems*, p. 202.

the 'end' he [Eliot] has in view implies the Christian tradition as the context that defines and explains his attitude. But that tradition includes a wide range of diversities; there is more than one Christianity [...]. Eliot obviously assumes that the vindication of the spirit [...] entails that kind of association of 'birth and death' with blood and 'agony'. As insisted on, the association seems gratuitous and willed.[33]

However, within the context of aesthetic redemption, the unpleasantness and the immediacy of sacrificial images is certainly a vindication of the spirit, given the deeper significance of the aesthetic mechanisms of the ritual. In the same way, the blood and the killings on the ancient tragic stage point to a secret meaning beyond them: to the unmasterability of the ultimate reality by human endeavours. To discredit this passage of Eliot's poem is to close our eyes to its engagement with a mythic texture, as another point of intersection of the sacred and the aesthetic, underneath doctrinal convictions.

The symbolism of Pentecost is also intermingled in part IV of 'Little Gidding' with a sacral purifying fire that brings ancient resonances:

> The dove descending breaks the air
>
> With flame of incandescent terror
>
> Of which the tongues declare
>
> The one discharge from sin and error.
>
> The only hope, or else despair

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[33] F.R.Leavis, *The Living Principle: 'English' as a Discipline of Thought* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), p. 207.

Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre —

To be redeemed from fire by fire

Who then devised the torment? Love.

Love is the unfamiliar Name

Behind the hands that wove

The intolerable shirt of flame

Which human power cannot remove

We only live, only suspire

Consumed by either fire or fire.[34]

This passage rests on the mythopoeic possibilities of Christianity, indeed on a mythic conception of Christianity itself. At the same time, it provides a space in which poetry can be conceived as a sacred act. In accord with this, Vincent Buckley, commenting on some remarks made by contemporary poets, says that

> they are speaking, not of religion in poetry but of poetry as a religious act; [...] they are locating the religious nature of that act neither in some thesis about the autotelic status of poetry nor in some contention about the basic themes or subjects for poetry but in terms of how the poet is brought as a religious being, concerned with human life and an actor in its drama, to create works which themselves carry his religious being, fortify creation and exist as, in a sense, sacred spaces.[35]

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[34] Eliot, 'Little Gidding' IV, in *Collected Poems*, p. 221.

[35] Vincent Buckley, *Poetry and the Sacred* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), p. 9.

If 'to "demythologise" Christianity involves de-supernaturalising it in accordance with the demands of a de-supernaturalised world', the space of poetry, on the contrary, favours the mythic creation within, since the art and act of poetry

> serve something of the purpose of a sacralising act; they are resorted to in order to set aside certain experiences or places or people or memories as representatively revealing ones — in however attenuated a form, sacred ones.[36]

Eliot's lyric voice in *Four Quartets* participates in this sacralising act that poetry is, in so far as what is heard there is not a body of doctrine, but an appeal to a primary experience of the sacred through a resort to Christian motifs. This appeal may seem to be belated, since 'by the time Yeats was coming into his strength and Eliot was beginning to publish, Nietzsche's "God is dead" had gone deep into the individual consciousness and was already permeating the culture';[37] nevertheless, just as Nietzsche's diagnosis pointed to a stage in a process that he regretted on the whole (the disenchantment of the modern world), Eliot's commitment to the sacred adopts the form of the restatement of an original link, eluding being encapsulated in a definite form of orthodoxy or heresy.

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[36] Buckley, *Poetry and the Sacred*, p. 21.

[37] Buckley, *Poetry and the Sacred*, p. 56.

5.3. A Ritualistic Use of Language

This original link between sacredness and the aesthetic, that has been revealed by a penetration through both scattered and interwoven references, pervades the texts at the level of their own materiality: both *A Portrait of the Artist* and *Four Quartets* present a surface of ritualistic use of words. The ritual of repetition is present throughout Joyce's novel, from the early years of Stephen, when

> words which he did not understand he said over and over to himself till he had learned them by heart: and through them he had glimpses of the real world about him.[38]

Understanding does not come through the dual structure of words whose meanings are known to Stephen, but through a ritual acquaintance with the presence of the signifier, whose own force draws him to a deeper reality; words are not an instrument of learning, but loquacious presences among the objects of a material world.

Such a conception of language announces an engagement with the analogical mode of thought: a way of thinking that does not oppose the plane of meaning to the plane of expression, but that, on the contrary, presupposes a structure of reality in which entities reproduce infinitely within one another. In such a world, words lose their dual configuration (in terms of form and

meaning) in order to enter a continuity which is itself as a whole charged with meaning; language renounces its privileged position as an instrument for understanding, removed from the reality that it portrays, in order to take part in an inexhaustible interplay among the constituents of a meaningful world. The possibilities that analogical thought offers are explicitly welcome by Stephen in the Proteus episode of *Ulysses*:

> Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs.[39]

The 'coloured signs' of sensible experience are also 'signatures' to be read, because meaning is not restricted to the realm of language; by the same token, language recovers it own materiality, its own quality as an object, and thus becomes a thing among things, while all of them constantly speak their meaning.

The multidirectional character of threads of meaning that this view implies is one of the basic traits of *Ulysses*, but, even though less apparent, it is also present in *A Portrait of the Artist*, where the complex interplay of references subsists without casting a shadow on the intelligibility of the narrative (see below, 5.5.2). In both novels, this intensified complexity of

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[38] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 64.

[39] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 37.

interconnected meanings is possible thanks to the underlying linguistic conception that Stephen suggests in *A Portrait of the Artist*, with the 'glimpses of the real world around him' provided by his mindless repetitions. Only if a continuity is granted between the words themselves and the reality that they signify can Stephen's repetitions allow him to glimpse into the real world without the mediation of the understanding. The granting of such a continuity is a characteristically Modernist turn, at a time of enhanced awareness of the non-instrumental nature of language, when even the claim is made that the world itself is primarily constituted *as a language*.

Nevertheless, the modern tradition had already shown at times its reluctance to wholly reject the possibility of this continuity, even if its reluctance hindered the modern projects of rationality. The clearest example of this attitude may be the Romantics' fascination with analogical thought and analogical relationships within nature. Although still not with the radical gesture of Modernism, Romanticism already looked for an extension of the modern paradigm of understanding that would come to affect fundamental assumptions of Modernity, and thus looked back in nostalgia to the obscurity and magic of the Middle Ages and the ancient past. Modernism performs a more decisive break with the modern enlightened tradition, and this opens the door (unlike in the case of Romanticism) to a direct engagement with the modes of representation previous to the inauguration of such a tradition. In these modes of representation the fundamental distinction between the order of things and the linguistic order is not operative: things are 'signatures' as much as

words are sacred; the supralunar world reflects the structure of ours, and each organism contains within itself a picture of the whole universe of which it is a part, the world thus being always in excess of itself, both infinitely containing and infinitely contained in its constituents. The continuity in which the fluidity between things and words is inscribed allows for an intervention in the order of things through a ritual utterance. It is to this ancient magic world that Stephen's repetitions take us back, giving us the key for an interpretative attitude that could be attentive to the inexhaustible meaningfulness of words, but also to the sacred continuity to which they open, both as depictors of an enchanted nature (see below, 7.1) and as disclosers of epiphanic moments (see below, 6.5).

Against the sacred power of words, as part of a world constituted by analogical relationships, the impulse towards individuation draws boundaries around words and around the realities that they signify: the dual structure of form and meaning already involves a breach in continuity; from this point, the path towards higher degrees of individuation lies parallel to that of the instrumentalisation of language: only formal languages, the instrumental languages *par excellence*, can accurately name the individual, which is only partially captured within the boundaries of the proper name or the terminological noun. Therefore, language itself is not to blame as the individuating force that segments the original continuity, because language can be restored to the sacredness of the ritual, just as Apolline clarity, in Nietzsche's terms, can be restored to its interplay with a Dionysiac obscurity that it never completely overcomes. Stephen experiences this tension: his concern with his

own selfhood and individuality (with his inwardness as the sacred space of the artist) results in a monstrosity that has to be redeemed by embracing a life without the boundaries of the inner self. When the spell of individuation leaves Stephen too far removed from the vitality of the real, he has to exorcise his dimness by invoking names that, even if proper names, are dissolved in the materiality of their own careful enunciation:

> by his monstrous way of life he seemed to have put himself beyond the limits of reality. Nothing moved him or spoke to him from the real world unless he heard in it an echo of the infuriated cries within him [...]. He could scarcely recognise as his his own thoughts, and repeated slowly to himself: — I am Stephen Dedalus. I am walking beside my father whose name is Simon Dedalus. We are in Cork, in Ireland. Cork is a city. Our room is in the Victoria Hotel. Victoria and Stephen and Simon. Simon and Stephen and Victoria. Names.[40]

The plastic force of the ritual of repetition reaches its peak in Joyce's reproduction of the act of contrition, whose textual quality breaks the fictional barrier to allow us to access the transcendent immediacy of the materiality of the printed word:

> — *O my God* —
>
> — *O my God* —
>
> — *I am heartily sorry* —
>
> — *I am heartily sorry* —

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[40] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 98.

— for having offended Thee —

— for having offended Thee—

— and I detest my sins —

— and I detest my sins —

— above every other evil —

— above every other evil —

— because they displease Thee, my God—

— because they displease Thee, my God —

— Who art so deserving —

— Who art so deserving —

— of all my love —

— of all my love —

— and I firmly purpose—

— and I firmly purpose —

— by Thy holy grace —

— by Thy holy grace —

— never more to offend Thee —

— never more to offend Thee —

— and to amend my life —

— and to amend my life. —[41]

The sermons that had preceded this act of contrition, and that fill a great part of chapter III, are another example of a use of words that goes beyond the simply evocative or instrumental: even if these are not sacred words, the heavy rhetorical charge and excessive length of the speeches transforms the sermons into more than an uttered text. Our own exposure to them makes us understand

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[41] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 146.

Stephen's reaction: 'so intense are Stephen's revulsion and conversion that he becomes physically ill and experiences a mystical vision of hell',[42] and we know that this is not simply due to an expounded doctrine, but to the formal qualities of the very words with which we have been confronted.

The ritualistic use of words in *Four Quartets* is hard to isolate, since in fact lyric poetry itself can be regarded as ritual utterance, formally manifested in the richness of devices and mechanisms of repetition and formal interplay. To the extent to which lyric poetry is constituted by a formal structure of repetitions (of sounds, rhythmic patterns, words, phrases, etc.), its essence appears more clearly defined in relation to an original kinship with both music and sacred formulae. Poetry's original relation to music is pointed out by Nietzsche, of which relation evidence is given by 'the most important phenomenon in the whole of ancient poetry, the unification, or indeed the identity — which they assumed to be quite natural — of the *lyric poet with the musician*'.[43]

The very title of *Four Quartets* suggests a musical character that in this case is not only due to the standard procedures of lyrical composition, such as this anaphora in 'East Coker':

And a time for living and for generation

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[42] Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*, p. 275.

[43] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 28.

And a time to shake the wainscot where the field-mouse trots

And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent motto

or this other one in the same poem:

To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not

You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy

In order to arrive at what you do not know

You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.

In order to possess what you do not possess

You must go by the way of dispossession

In order to arrive at what you are not

You must go through the way in which you are not.

And what you do not know is the only thing you know

And what you own is what you do not own

And where you are is where you are not.[44]

The music that the title suggests is to be found in a pattern that affects the whole work: a pattern of theme and development, not in the manner of a logical enquiry, but in that of musical composition, attentive to the flux of an underlying spirit.

Four Quartets, however, does not include direct quotations of passages of the Christian ritual, as, for example, *Ash Wednesday* does:

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[44] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 201.

Because these wings are no longer wings to fly

But merely vans to beat the air

The air which is now thoroughly small and dry

Smaller and dryer than the will

Teach us to care and not to care

Teach us to sit still

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death

Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.[45]

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[45] Eliot, 'Ash Wednesday' I, in *Collected Poems*, p. 96. Moreover, as Linda leavell points out, the ritualistic use of language in a poem so explicitly Christian as 'Ash Wednesday' extends far beyond Christian resonances: 'In the final stanza of the poem, the speaker addresses in his ritual the divine source of life, the holy mother:

Sister, mother

And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,

Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto thee.

The spirit of the river is the spirit of betweennes, of the unbroken wings flying seaward; the spirit of the sea is the source of life from which we are separated when we are born, like a baby from his mother. And the cry we send to thee is less than a word; it is only a primal sign from a baby to its mother; it is the ritual itself. In prayer the language is mere nonsense and inadequate to speak to God, and yet the prayer and thus the language itself must be uttered in order to cry to a meaning beyond itself'. (Linda Leavell, 'Eliot's Ritual Method', in Olney James (ed.) *T. S. Eliot: Essays from the 'Southern Review'*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 151.)

But the fact that the direct use of the poetic possibilities of Christian ritual does not appear in *Four Quartets* does not necessarily weaken the connections pointed out and the suggested genealogy of the poetic word: this absence can be interpreted as the result of a movement towards the purification of poetical essence in Eliot's lyric development, establishing the aesthetic value of the ritual through its mechanisms rather than through the insertion of the texts themselves.

5.4. Mythopoeia and Pagan Myth

It is not only within the co-ordinates of Christianity that these texts put forward a mythical conception of reality. The circularity of time and the veneration of nature in *Four Quartets* prove the contrary, even if open references to a sacredness other than Christian are difficult to find there; also Eliot acknowledges the mythopoeic essence of the human spirit at the beginning of 'Burnt Norton':

> Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
> Cannot bear very much reality,[46]

paradoxically affirming at the same time the value of human perception as criterion of reality:

> And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
> Had the look of flowers that are looked at.[47]

This paradox points to a fundamental theoretical assumption of literary Modernism: the ultimate justification of reality as aesthetic in character. Aesthetic experience and creation, taken as inherently human activities, become the model for any approach to reality, including an approach that seeks to grasp,

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[46] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 190.

[47] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 190.

behind the elusive interplay of appearances, the ontological ground of what is. Human kind are essentially mythopoeic, creating narratives and aesthetic constructs that are decidedly contingent and removed from the authenticity of the real ('human kind / Cannot bear very much reality'). At the same time, what is real can only claim its ontological status within the structures of human perception and representation, and this is why 'the roses / Had the look of flowers that are looked at'.

A theory that unfolds this paradoxical assumption can be found in *The Birth of Tragedy*; There Nietzsche repeatedly concludes that 'it is only as *an aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*',[48] thus establishing the basis for the aesthetic turn in modern sensibility: the aesthetic paradigm becomes the only legitimate paradigm to confront reality when it comes to *justification*, that is to say, when we are interested in its ultimate metaphysical ground. It is only within the aesthetic mechanisms of representation that we may find the justification for the *phenomenon* of the world. Reality unfolds for Nietzsche *as* a work of art (of which we are also part). Art becomes the model based on which we can understand reality, not by virtue of the legitimacy of a metaphor, but by that of the continuity between art and nature: 'art is not only an imitation of the truth of nature but a metaphysical supplement to that truth of nature'.[49] The legitimacy of the aesthetic mode of understanding to confront reality is granted by the fact that reality unfolds *as* a

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[48] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p.33.

[49] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p.114.

work of art, as the 'artistic game which the will, in the eternal abundance of its pleasure, plays with itself'.[50]

The characterisation of reality in aesthetic terms still raises the question about the status of what remains *behind* the phenomena that existence and the world constitute. Nevertheless, the answer to this question is now essentially different from what past metaphysical systems could provide: the status of the universal artistic will is not that of a static otherworldly ground, but that of a dynamic force that eternally produces the world out of its own excess. In this sense, Nietzsche's notion of 'universal will' in *The Birth of Tragedy* prefigures his later notion of the 'will to power'.

The problem still remains that the world has been reduced not only to the category of illusoriness, but also to an illusoriness constituted through the mechanisms of aesthetic activity, which import the contingent character of what is constructed by us. How to accept as the ultimate metaphysical structure (as the articulatory basis of phenomena) a structure that mirrors human contingent activity? In other words, how to elevate aesthetic practice to the status of ontological justification without doing a violence to these very concepts?

This is the problem encountered by modernist mythopoeic activity, in which both Eliot and Joyce participate: 'modernist mythopoeia is a way of

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[50] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p.115.

combining radical relativity with the apodictic nature of conviction'.[51] Relativity springs from the dependence on structures that have their origin in inherently human modes of activity; apodictic conviction results from the claim to ultimate justification that these structures hold. Yet this theoretical irreconcilability is not apparent in Nietzsche's theory, and is even successfully resolved within the texture of modernist literature, where art positively becomes an all-embracing category:

> [Nietzsche] assimilated the dualistic elements of life and art so completely that they ceased to be separably apparent, and this is an important clue to the metaphysics of literary modernism at large. In the great works of modernism [...], the mythopoeic metaphysic disappears into the texture of the living experience, or of the text, achieving very often a naturalness which has effectively disguised the metaphysical implication of its aesthetic forms.[52]

But the naturalness of mythopoeic activity is not always so easily achieved, and the power of its paradoxes returns when we consider the implications for morality and religion. A view that applies the Nietzschean aesthetic structure to religious belief has to conclude, with Henri Bergson, that 'the pantheon exists independent of man, but on man depends the placing of a god in it, and the

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[51] Michael Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth: Belief and Responsibility in 20th Century Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 4.

[52] Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth*, p.24.

bestowal of existence on that deity'.[53] This view, that Bergson attributes to the religious mind of ancient civilisations, is alien to modern forms of understanding; thus he adds: 'such an attitude of mind does indeed surprise us to-day'. An analogous surprise is that arising from the survey of a metaphysical picture such as the one in *The Birth of Tragedy*, where 'transcendental' value is conceptually dependent on artistic creation, but at the same time is assigned the absolute value of what ontologically precedes human contingency.

The same paradox can be easily extended to the realm of moral value: the illusory status of value, its aesthetically created character, counts against its effective governing power over human action:

> There is indeed no objective value — the 'ideal' is illusory — yet human greatness lies in acting as if there were. It resides in the unending struggle with the recalcitrant 'tyranny of the real', in the heroic quest for intimations of the numinous which can never be rewarded by success — except in mythopoeic self-deception.[54]

But how to engage in a successful self-deception? Isn't a willing and conscious self-deception a contradiction in terms? Given that the naivity of the pre-

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[53] Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. A. Audra and C. Brereton (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), p. 200.

[54] Peter Poellner, 'Early Nietzsche and the Transfiguration of Nature', published as 'Der Frühe Nietzsche und die Verklärung der Natur' in *Nietzscheforschung* 3 (1996) (Berlin: Akademie Verlag), pp. 288-9.

modern mind to which Bergson alludes is no longer available to us, is Nietzsche's aesthetic metaphysics a fruitful ground for the modernist experience?

The aesthetic accomplishment of modernist literature suggests itself as an index of an answer to these questions. I shall attempt to give an account of the reasons for this accomplishment as exemplified in the works by Eliot and Joyce, thus trying to provide answers while showing that the embracing of modernist aesthetics brings consequences for an understanding of religious and moral value. Since this will become clearer in the context of Eliot and Joyce's mythical conception of Christianity, I shall postpone this account until 6.2.

In *A Portrait of the Artist* the weight of mythopoeic activity rests also on the possibilities offered by pagan myth. It is the web of implicit or alluded mythical narratives that gives the novel its ultimate meaning, and these narratives often fall within the domain of a pre-Christian mythology.

The ancient myth of Icarus and Dedalus governs the structure of the story; explicit references to it can be found, among other places, at the opening and at the closing of the text: in Ovid's epigraph and in the last entry of Stephen's diary. This final sentence draws attention to the dangers of artistic boldness, of flying too near the sun, and it does so in the form of an appeal to

Dedalus' guidance: '27 *April*. Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead'.[55]

In view of the whole story, Stephen's surname is disambiguated: he is the young Icarus, not the wise artificer whose artistic fatherhood he fails to bring to his side. Stephen's journey of self-discovery is not only the epic inner quest of the modern hero in search of his own identity; it is also the mythic voyage of a youngster too bold to lend ears to the wisdom of the old, and therefore doomed to a tragic end. Stephen's aestheticism is thus bound to fail when inscribed within the mythic structure that underlies the story: Stephen's attitudes, theories and expectations are put at a distance by the counterbalance of a negative valuation arising from the mythic narrative upon which they rest.

This is a use of myth that attends to its structuring possibilities rather than to its content: the pattern of ascension and fall, and of tragic denial of parental authority, belongs both to *A Portrait of the Artist* and to the story of Icarus and Dedalus trying to escape from the labyrinth of Crete. Joyce's use of this myth, as a background pattern that also completes a suspended judgement on Stephen, points to a conception of myth as a structural truth, as a persisting pattern whose validity lies not in its content but in its very structure, and whose truth is endlessly and implicitly restated in narratives distant in time.

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[55] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 276.

Joyce subscribes most clearly to this idea of myth as structure with his writing of *Ulysses*, where the Homeric world lies always outside the text in terms of content, but always within when it comes to structure. Once again, the elaborate texture of parallelisms of *Ulysses* finds a precedent in *A Portrait of the Artist*. The cyclical character of mythic time and the structural repetition that any mythic narrative constitutes, already show within *A Portrait of the Artist* Joyce's concern with the value of mythic structure:

> [...]the action of each of the five chapters is really the same action. The pattern of dream nourished in contempt of reality, put into practice, and dashed by reality, is worked out in the five chapters in five main modes, and in numerous subordinate instances.[56]

It is precisely when Stephen's experience is marked by the paradoxical temporality of mythic time, that the text itself shows its structure of repetition, even in the most explicit manner. Stephen and his beloved E. C. take the last tram home, and then Stephen arrives to an intense state of awareness, in which

> he heard what her eyes said to him from beneath their cowl and knew that in some dim past, whether in life or in revery, he had heard their tale before.[57]

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[56] Kenner, 'The *Portrait* in perspective', in Seon Givens (ed.). *James Joyce: Two Decades of Criticism*, reprinted in Thomas Connolly (ed.), *Joyce's* Portrait*: Criticisms and Critiques* (London: Peter Owen, 1964), p. 56.

To this realisation follows Stephen's recalling of the time spent with Eileen, which is reproduced not through evocative allusions, but through a deliberate repetition of terms that the narrator already employed when this scene was first depicted.[58] Similarly, some lines of the passage that precedes Stephen's mingling of life and revery reappear unaltered in a later recalling.[59] The unpredictable succession of events, like the linearity of the narrative, seem then to be subject to a mythic structure of repetition.

The mythic domain to which the overall structure of *A Portrait of the Artist* resorts is, as in *Ulysses*, that of pagan antiquity. However, the pagan experience of sacredness finds other expressions in the novel: Joyce transports us to the realm of Celtic myth when he portrays Stephen choosing a wood as a place that is apt for praying and charged with holiness:

> he remembered an evening when he had dismounted from a borrowed creaking bicycle to pray to God in a wood near Malahide. He had lifted up his arms and spoken in ecstasy to the sombre nave of the trees, knowing that he stood on holy ground and in a holy hour.[60]

It is important to note Stephen's posture, with his arms lifted up, as an expression of an attitude that is the direct opposite of a Christian spirit of

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[57] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p.72

[58] Compare Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 72-3 with p. 43.

[59] See Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 241.

[60] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 252.

servitude, and therefore essentially different from the kneeling down of Christian prayer.

Yet Stephen holds towards the pagan holiness of his Irish ancestors the same attitude as towards Catholicism: Joyce tells us of Davin, one of Stephen's fellow students, whose

> nurse had taught him Irish and shaped his rude imagination by the broken lights of Irish myth. He stood towards this myth upon which no individual mind had ever drawn out a line of beauty and to its unwieldy tales that divided themselves as they moved down the cycles in the same attitude as towards the Roman catholic religion, the attitude of a dullwitted loyal serf.[61]

This tells us not so much about Stephen's or Joyce's personal allegiance to the national or religious causes behind the myth, but rather about the kinship between these causes precisely by virtue of their mythical character: there is a point at which Irish nationalism is for Stephen as despicable as Roman Catholicism, but the possibility of their clash at the mythical level remains more revealing than Stephen's valuation here, since we have already seen that the ritual aspects of Catholicism belong to Stephen's life as part of his aesthetic vocation. Stephen's joint rejection of Irish myth and Catholicism as forms of servitude is here the other side of a joint embrace of both (partially illustrated by his praying in the wood) as mythical manifestations of aesthetic sacredness.

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[61] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 195.

5.5. Restatement of a Nietzschean Dynamic: The Concern with Form

5.5.1. Organicity and Analogy in *Four Quartets*.

Myth, the element without which 'all culture loses its healthy and natural creative power',[62] rests for Nietzsche in the balanced dynamic of the Apolline and the Dionysiac, of which tragic myth is the final achievement. The formal concerns that arise from *A Portrait of the Artist* and *Four Quartets* restate this dynamic, because the high level of formal awareness and perfection that they contain remains tied to an essential unmasterability. In *Four Quartets*, form and pattern are opposed to music and movement, in a reformulation of the Nietzschean opposition, but its paradoxical mutual dependence is stated as a condition of the distinction. Thus in 'Burnt Norton', V, we read:

> Words move, music moves
> Only in time; but that which is only living
> Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
> Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
> Can words or music reach
> The stillness, as a Chinese jar still

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[62] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 109.

Moves perpetually in its stillness.[63]

The Apolline pattern grants movement its eternity, but it is simultaneously subjected to the perpetual movement that it hides. The eternity of a life that is more than 'only living', and more than only words or music reaching into silence, depends not on the static quality of an eternalising pattern, but on the form of a perpetual movement. The validity of a pattern dissociated from the ever-changing flux that constitutes the ultimate truth cannot be sustained:

The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,

For the pattern is new in every moment

And every moment is a new and shocking

Valuation of all we have been.[64]

Thus the Nietzschean distrust of the illuminating power of form is here restated. The form that Eliot welcomes, the form of the Chinese jar, still and moving, has a necessary relation with life and dynamism:

'form' and 'pattern' ('Gestalt' in the background) are words that convey the indisputable truth that the whole may be more than the sum of the parts. This last phrase suggests organism, and 'organism' implies life.[65]

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[63] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 194.

[64] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 199.

[65] Leavis, *The Living Principle*, p. 226.

Eliot's formal concerns take into account the inscription of form within a life that exceeds it, but also the dependence of life upon its formal expression: this double logic is contained in the paradoxical

> as a Chinese jar still
> Moves perpetually in its stillness,

as well as in a recurrent pun on the double meaning of the word 'still': as an adverb of time and as an adjective denoting lack of motion. Elusive temporality and the transcendental truth of pattern are but two sides of the same, and through this inescapable association Eliot builds a text that presupposes an internal commitment to life and dynamism. In this sense, *Four Quartets* can be fruitfully approached through the notion of 'organism', as Leavis suggests, since the organic model of structure is precisely that which fuses the rigidity of form with the ever-changing life of engenderment and generation. It is also in this sense that the structure of analogical representation outlined in *The Birth of Tragedy* and implicit in *A Portrait of the Artist* (see 6.3.1) also applies to the underlying aesthetic of *Four Quartets*: form and life in a true work of art are not only a precondition of each other, but also each other's excess; organic reproduction both escapes and does not escape the transitoriness of the natural realm within which it occurs, since 'art is *not only* an imitation of the truth of nature, but a metaphysical supplement to that truth of nature, coexisting with it in order to overcome it'.[66] That is to say, the organic mode of artistic

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[66] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 114 [my italics].

representation tries to overcome the dynamism of the truth of nature by an Apolline appeal to the illusoriness of a transcendent pattern, but since this pattern always falls back to the organic whole to which it belongs, form and contingency cannot but remain in tense coexistence.

Organic reproduction is thus grounded on the same questioning of mimesis that is present both in Nietzsche's deciphering of the Apolline pretension of clarity and in Joyce's ritualistic use of words. Mimesis as the core of artistic representation had been regarded as an operation of mirroring that presupposed an essential difference between two orders of reality: nature and art; the questioning of this mimetic structure implied a return to the richer possibilities of analogical modes of representation. Now Eliot's concern with pattern has led us to a similar criticism of mimesis and a similar return to the privileging of analogical relationships. The fact that Eliot's concern with form and pattern suggests the ideas of organism and organic life completes the aesthetics outlined by Nietzsche and embraced by Joyce: to a worldview that thinks of reality as held together by inexhaustible analogical relationships between entities, an organic view of reality adds the centrality of the living being, as a crucial point of intersection from which to understand the hierarchy of the real. Yet the organic remains only an instance of the mode of configuration by which structures reproduce within one another without being reducible to the sum of its constituents: analogy is thus a category that encompasses organicity, and grounds the tension between form and dynamism.

This unstable tension is at stake in Eliot's concept of 'stillness', a central notion in the poems, around which revolve both the craving for the eternal and the reflections on the transitoriness of life. In Buckley's formulation,

> faith and doubt are, in Eliot's poetry, the bright misty outline of each other; and since it is pattern, not instantaneous revelation, that is in question, there is a dialectic in each of his major works between form and fragmentation, the establishment of pattern and the capture of the elusive moment.[67]

Even if we prefer to talk of a misty outline of each other, of an irrecoverable excess in respect to each other, rather than talking of a 'dialectic', the question of this unstable relationship remains central: 'the problem which *Four Quartets* pose, and pose quite deliberately, is that of the relation between moment and continuity, perception and pattern, shaft of sunlight and crowned knot of fire'.[68] The success of *Four Quartets* in finding a solution for this problem consists in restating it not in terms of problem and solution, but in terms of an exploratory enquiry whose pattern is determined by its dynamism, as an aesthetic of incompletion that incorporates the force of its own production, just as an organic being owes its form to an undetachable process of generation. *Four Quartets*

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[67] Buckley, *Poetry and the Sacred*, p. 207.

[68] Buckley, *Poetry and the Sacred*, p. 219.

achieves the pattern which is its subject; but it does so only by fighting out interiorly, and with great courage and resource, the problem involved of realising the possibility of pattern at each stage. This is perhaps the deepest sense in which it is an exploratory work; the 'concepts' it creates have to do with its own procedures as much as with any philosophical or theological mysteries.[69]

The representational techniques that go with such a conception of artistic creation have to renounce the dualism inherent to restrictive symbolic structures that equate mimesis and representation. An organic reality that contains both the products and the objects of representation can only be rendered accurately by an analogical structure of meaning, to which Joyce has already introduced us; similarly, Eliot's technique

> is patterned in such a way as to evoke with splendid accuracy the feel of one order of existence yet to evoke also another order of existence to which the first has an analogical reference. It works not by deploying a central symbol in the midst of the details of some actual situation, but by suggesting symbolic references in the whole, and in every part, of what is sensuously present. We may call this an analogical use of symbolism.[70]

The building of analogical rather than merely symbolic relationships, and the underlying organic conception of reality, necessarily result in a view that

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[69] Buckley, *Poetry and the Sacred*, p. 221.

conceives of nature as a sacred space, pervaded by the external sacredness which Modernity seemed unable to discover any longer, and which both Nietzsche and literary Modernism reaffirm within the limits of the aesthetic. The gods come back to inhabit the world, restoring the lost continuity between divinity and creation, and the reality of a fallen nature recovers the stamp of the divine. This becomes particularly clear in Eliot's treatment of nature, where as a result of an analogical treatment

> fire, frost, sap, blossom, cold, heat are items of a spiritual as well as a climatic condition; the pattern they compose reflects one in which Grace is co-present with nature, and in which the paradoxes of this extraordinary state of nature present the possibility of Grace.[71]

This 'extraordinary state of nature' with which Eliot presents us is the result of a breach with the previous aesthetic tradition; analogy and organicity, as the modes of thought that granted the possibility of an enchanted nature, had persisted throughout Modernity and had even acquired a crucial role in the Romantic aesthetic. Nevertheless, the Modernist turn involves a direct engagement with those modes of thought, granting an experience that does not have to be clouded by anachronism or nostalgia. For the Modernist experience,

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[70] Buckley, *Poetry and the Sacred*, pp. 232-3

[71] Buckley, *Poetry and the Sacred*, p. 233.

nature has lost its divine character only to recover it through the transfigurative power of the artistic stance towards the world.

Nietzsche had incorporated these two elements (disenchanted nature and transfigurative art) to his theorising, following the Schopenhauerian ideas of the blindness of nature and the redemptive power of art. Yet Nietzsche's commitment to the artistic mode of experience (which pervaded his work up to the very end) allowed him to recover a conception of nature that joined divine significance with distance from Romantic visions. Precisely because nature is an amoral force (has become the Schopenhauerian flux of willing), we are in position to experience its original sacredness, its primary significance. What generates a pessimistic view in Schopenhauer becomes motive of joy in Nietzsche: the unavailability of spiritualised Romantic nature re-establishes our link with an originary experience, which to be fully authentic has to do away with the co-ordinates within which Modernity tried to understand it. On the other hand, the change of paradigm is only possible through an intensified awareness of the transfiguring power of art; art is not a consolation for the evils of existence, for the alienation from a disenchanted and amoral nature; art is the affirmation that restores reality to its dignity, nature to its sacredness, without turning them into an inaccessible realm or a subjective perception. The transfigurative power of art frames Nietzsche's metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy*, but it is ultimately the constant reference for a refinement of his concepts on his way to the metaphysics of the will to power, where the model is

still that of the power of artistic creation. Charles Taylor points to this continuity when he says that

> Nietzsche wanted to put behind him the doctrine of aesthetic transfiguration which he drew from Schopenhauer, and which marks his early work. He wanted to go beyond 'justifying' the world through its manifestation in art and really affirm it. But some aspect of aesthetic transfiguration remains. What in the universe commands our affirmation, when we have overcome the all-too-human, is not properly called its goodness but comes close to being its beauty. It is perhaps not reducible to, but cannot be quite separate from, aesthetic categories.[72]

Through transfigurative art the universe becomes significant at a time when the emotive unity that the Romantics reached with nature is no longer credible; the creative power of the artistic imagination can no longer rely on the alignment between nature and the passions of the individual spirit, but this impossibility opens us to the richness of analogical structures of meaning, within which we can be fully reconciled with the sacredness of the external world, and communicate with the divine signs of creation. Thus for Eliot

> The dance along the artery
>
> The circulation of the lymph
>
> Are figured in the drift of stars

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[72] Taylor, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 454.

Ascend to summer in the tree

We move among the moving tree

In light upon the figured leaf

And hear upon the sodden floor

Below, the boarhound and the boar

Pursue their pattern as before

But reconciled among the stars.[73]

The pattern that reconciles heaven and earth and presents the possibility of Grace shows now its kinship with the organic pattern that *Four Quartets* presuppose and are inscribed within.

Likewise, Eliot reconciles nature and the world of the spirit in an appeal to a sensibility for which the spirit permeates familiar spaces. Thus in *Ash Wednesday* the following exhortation closes the poem:

Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden,

Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood

Teach us to care and not to care

Teach us to sit still

Even among these rocks,

Our peace in His will

And even among these rocks

Sister, mother

And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,

Suffer me not to be separated

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[73] Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', in *Collected Poems*, p.191.

> And let my cry come unto Thee.[74]

Here there is an explicit desire to recover the lost unity with nature, which is at the same time a desire for a communion with the universal spirit from which the self cannot 'suffer to be separated'. The feminine figure of the addressee, sister and mother, is evocative not only of the interceding powers of the Virgin Mary, but also of the female gender of the spirit of natural production and generation. The individuality of the lyric voice longs to be absorbed by the whole, even if this involves a loss of self.

But, if the relative autonomy of the Romantic self is not present in the Modernist poetry of T. S. Eliot (in order to remain open to the richness of external sacredness) what is the status of the individual spirit here? How to account for the detailed account of personal memories and impressions? One could say that *Four Quartets* suggests

> a fine balance between concentrated attention and the expansive response, between awareness of particulars and delight in the whole [...]; an 'impersonality' has been achieved not by escaping from or by disguising emotion but by accepting it and using it as an agent in the development of an analogical vision [...]: a great religious poetry may

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[74] Eliot, *Ash Wednesday*, V, in *Collected Poems*, p. 105.

> be written in our time by accepting the self and, as it were, exploring its content.[75]

We could go even further, and affirm that the exploration of inwardness and the meaningfulness of an analogical world go together, since being faithful to the authenticity of one's own inner experience involves a breaking down of the boundaries of individual consciousness. In this sense Modernist literature implies a turn inward, a commitment to the exploration of the complexities of the inner self; for this task to be fulfilled, however, the self has to renounce its illusory unity and acknowledge its position at the point of convergence of multiple webs of meaning. The modernist self, as the self in *Four Quartets* and *Ash Wednesday*, is no longer unitary, and loses its centre. In Taylor's words,

> [...] the epiphanic centre of gravity begins to be displaced from the self to the flow of experience, to new forms of unity, to language conceived in a variety of ways — eventually even as a 'structure'. An age starts of 'decentering' subjectivity [...]. Decentering is not the alternative to inwardness; it is its complement.[76]

But the new conception of inwardness, which is also an enhancement, performs the same break with the Modern tradition as the one we encountered in the use

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[75] Buckley, *Poetry and the Sacred*, pp. 233-4.

[76] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 465.

of modes of representation and treatments of nature. The rejection of the mimetic paradigm and the estrangement from nature are manifested at the level of the subject in a rejection of the notion of a unitary self:

> [...] a turn inward, to experience or subjectivity, didn't mean a turn to a *self* to be articulated, where this is understood as an alignment of nature and reason, or instinct and creative power. On the contrary, the turn inward may take us beyond the self as usually understood, to a fragmentation of experience which calls our ordinary notions of identity into question [...].[77]

Thus the loss of individual identity lies behind the intensity of experience in *Four Quartets*, as well as the sacredness of nature and the inexhaustibility of meaning.

5.5.2. Language as a Questioning of Selfhood

The exploration of Eliot's handling of his formal concerns has revealed the possibility of and aesthetic rendering of external sacredness in spite of the individuation of the modern spirit. Let us see whether the same path leads us to similar results in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist*, where selfhood and the sacred character of the modern individual's experience are thematised more explicitly.

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[77] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 462.

In *A Portrait of the Artist*, the concern with form appears mainly as linguistic awareness, even though it is also significant that the narrative pattern as a whole has an epic nature, in that it depicts the spiritual voyage of the modern hero. But more present than a clearly defined structure of events is Stephen's constant reflection on language and words, denoting Joyce's formal concerns in connection, not only with the ritual functions already explored, but also with the inner world of the individual. Stephen wonders inwardly, through Joyce's use of free indirect speech:

> did he then love the rhythmic rise and fall of words better than their associations of legend and colour? Or was it that, being as weak of sight as he was shy of mind, he drew less pleasure from the reflections of the glowing sensible world through the prism of a language manycoloured and richly stored than from the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose?[78]

Here the contrast between the visual and the rhythmic shifts to that between what in words is 'legend', result of a communal experience, and what in them is instrument of the individual consciousness. The insistence on the importance of language, throughout the text and often in relation to Stephen's own conscious reflections, points to the irresolvability of Stephen's doubts, that is, to the impossibility of detaching one's own language from the mechanisms of its

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[78] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 180-1.

production within a historical community, and, therefore, to the impossibility of conceiving of the sacredness of the self away from a broader context of sacredness. The awareness of linguistic form is what always puts Stephen in connection with what he wants to escape from, while at the same time allowing him to build his own aesthetic world. Through words he feels that he can assert his own spirit, but through words also he feels that he has to renounce his selfhood:

> how beautiful the words were where they said *Bury me in the old churchyard*! A tremor passed over his body. How sad and how beautiful! He wanted to cry quietly but not for himself: for the words [...].[79]

This duality, characterising words as instruments of aesthetic self-realisation of the individual, but also as instruments of a constant loss in impersonality, stays unresolved throughout the novel, signalling how Joyce restated within his work the tension between form and the unmasterable, between linguistic pattern and formless reality. Stephen, who, using language as a poet, wants to affirm all the profundity of his own spirit, is made constantly aware of how his language is not just an instrument, but a reality that only to the extent to which it goes far beyond his individual history is apt for aesthetic purposes:

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[79] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 22.

> his own consciousness of language was ebbing from his brain and trickling into the very words themselves which set to band and disband themselves in wayward rhythms.[80]

The words arrange themselves without the intervention of Stephen's will; in fact, Stephen's linguistic awareness, and Joyce's insistence on the linguistic level of the novel, have the effect of a counterbalance to Stephen's own affirmation through art: he realises that because his language is, more than instrument, the matter for his aesthetic pursuits, his language has an obscure life beyond himself, and it asserts not so much the sacred character of his cherished selfhood as the sacredness of an impersonality beyond individuation.

Thus Stephen's experience of the possibilities of linguistic form results in a questioning of the unitary self analogous to that resulting from Eliot's concern with a dynamic pattern. The inexhaustibility of linguistic associations is not only the ground of a ritualistic use of language (as seen in 4.3.1.); it is also the instrument of the dissolution of the psychological boundaries of Stephen's selfhood:

> Joyce's associative techniques [...] are neither deterministic nor capricious. They are rooted in a patristic theory of language descended from the custom of viewing the universe as a book to be read, to which

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[80] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 193.

> any written book bears an analogical relation, so that the work of art always has ontological rather than merely psychological content.[81]

As with Eliot's formal concerns, the exploration of the complexity of linguistic patterns cannot be detached from an enriched conception of reality: 'the ambiguity of the words corresponds directly with the multiple significance of the object',[82] even if after *A Portrait of the Artist* for Joyce this correspondence seems to weaken in favour of a formalist interplay that progressively closes upon itself. Yet a continuity of aesthetics subsists, and we can even say, with H. Kenner, that 'the *Portrait* is not as far as it seems from *Finnegans Wake*; indeed, a Finneganistic handling of language appears beneath it as a sort of subconscious'.[83]

Sometimes linguistic awareness is even motive for Stephen's estrangement, as when he reflects on how the English language, as a cultural product of a historical community that is not his own, belongs to the dean before it belongs to him:

> the language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His

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[81] Kenner, 'The *Portrait* in Perspective', p. 47.

[82] Kenner, 'The *Portrait* in Perspective', p. 48.

[83] Kenner, 'The *Portrait* in Perspective', p. 48.

> language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech.[84]

Therefore, Joyce's restatement of the tension between form and indeterminacy, in the manner of linguistic awareness and association, counts against Stephen. However, just as Eliot reaches into a deeper communion with aesthetic sacredness when accepting the self and surpassing it, likewise Stephen's gestures cannot but include a wider and wiser scope of movement when advised by his awareness of a language that does and does not belong to him, that constitutes him and holds a necessary relation to what is other. Language for Joyce is not only the Apolline instrument of individuation and the guarantor of identity, but also the voice of the ritual and of the loss of the self in impersonality.

5.6. The Self-reflexivity of Art in Modernist Writing

The explicitness of formal awareness in *A Portrait of the Artist* leads to a movement of self-reflection: we participate in Stephen's train of thought because his mind is devoted to the words (often the written words) to which we have direct access; in this sense, the text of *A Portrait of the Artist* makes an object of itself, in an autoreferential gesture that is characteristic of Modernist literature. *A Portrait of the Artist* is a writing about the childhood and

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[84] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 205.

adolescence of a writer (the fictionalised author) that experiences language, often in its written form: therefore, the text in front of us has a problematic status, that resists a definition in relation to an instrumental or representative use of narrative language.

Reflexivity goes even further in *Four Quartets*, where some passages are a direct commentary of the preceding lines, and are acknowledged as such:

> That was a way of putting it — not very satisfactory:
>
> A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
>
> Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
>
> With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter.
>
> It was not (to start again) what one had expected.[85]

At times, the self-references adopt the form of a recalling proper to the style of prose writing:

> I have said before
>
> That the past experience revived in the meaning
>
> Is not the experience of one life only.[86]

Some other times, the object is not the text itself but the process of its composition, the interiority of the author in his creative process:

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[85] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 198.

[86] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p .208.

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years —

Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres* —

Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt

Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure.[87]

This reflexivity is a characteristic trait of an art that, through reflection on its own status, seeks to establish its autonomy with respect to everyday life. Detachment is manifested as a dissociation from the public sphere that has the consequence of asserting the sacredness of the private sphere, although at times, as in some avant-garde movements, detachment takes the opposite form: the active leadership of political or social subversion against established orders. In either case, what is presupposed is the irreconcilability of art and public life, of established social structures and aesthetic creation and experience, these now belonging to a purely autonomous realm, in a non-accidental parallel with the process of privatisation of religious experience that Modernity constitutes.

However, the refusal to submit to the ordered structure of the modern *polis* that Modernist art makes, and that is evoked by the self-reflexivity of the texts by Eliot and Joyce, also entails a certain return to an ancient community: that of the unifying religious character of the Dionysiac that allowed for

> the original formation of tragedy, whose purely religious beginnings rule out the very idea of contrasting the populace with the nobility, as indeed they exclude the whole area of political and social concerns.[88]

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[87] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 202.

Art's search for autonomy hides then the affirmation of another kind of community beyond the ordered structure of the secularised modern state: the affirmation of a community of sacredness.

With this idea in mind, the dissociation which reflexivity points to does not necessarily entail aestheticism, as a devotion to art against life. Rather, in so far as the idea of a community can be thought not in opposition to art but as required by the very idea of an art faithful to its origins, the notion of a sacred community depends on the idea of an autonomous art, and art becomes not an obstacle but a model for the affirmation of life, even of public life.

This surpassing of aestheticism that *The Birth of Tragedy* theorises may perhaps find a clearer example in the text of *Four Quartets*, since there poetry is conceived of in conjunction with a religious experience that is not restricted to the realm of the individual and that makes a considerable abstraction of a particular creed. *A Portrait of the Artist*, on the contrary, seems to surrender to the attitudes of an aesthetic decadentism, and some passages can certainly be viewed as a replica of 19th century aestheticism:

> O! In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh. Gabriel the seraph had come to the virgin's chamber. An afterglow deepened within his spirit, whence the white flame had passed, deepening to a rose and ardent light. That rose and ardent light was her

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[88] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 36.

> strange wilful heart, strange that no man had known or would know, wilful from the beginning of the world: and lured by that ardent roselike glow the choirs of the seraphim were falling from heaven.[89]

In contrast with these aestheticised images and delight in subtle devotional passions, the whole context of *A Portrait of the Artist* reveals more than just a superficial link between art and religion that would only adopt the form of an aesthetic recalling of the plastic suggestiveness of religious imagery; it reveals, rather, the texture of sacredness already referred to, intertwining Stephen's religious and aesthetic experience, and therefore it presupposes Stephen's failure after the final gesture of disavowal that closes the story.

For all this Stephen is not only an aesthete,[90] and *A Portrait of the Artist* contains more than aestheticism. The reconciliation of art and life, if unaccomplished within the plot, is already present in the complexity of Stephen's experience, even if he does not know how to interpret it: after all, he is still a 'young man'. And the terms of this reconciliation do not have to be those of a compromise ratified by biographical data: we do not need to 'conclude that Joyce modifies Stephen's theories';[91] we can understand *A Portrait of the Artist* as a profound aesthetic affirmation of life that redeems its own imperfections of attitude without having to resort to biography or textual

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[89] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 236.

[90] For the view of Stephen as an aesthete, see Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*, p. 263.

[91] Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*, p. 295.

history. Likewise, *Four Quartets* carries within itself the same Nietzschean affirmative aesthetic impulse, problematised in this case by questions of dogma and tradition.

6. Eliot vs. Joyce: The Dissymmetry of Convergent Lines

Both *Four Quartets* and *A Portrait of the Artist* restate a link between the sacred and the aesthetic, but they do so from standpoints that at times involve a clear opposition: while T. S. Eliot relies on the continuity of tradition to re-engage in a sacral-aesthetic experience, Joyce stresses the discontinuity that the rebellious spirit of Stephen sees as a necessary condition for his own consecration as an artist; while for Eliot religion becomes the privileged element, the source of sacredness that nurtures his creations, for Joyce art has to remain sovereign if it is to fulfil the ambitions of Stephen's aesthetic priesthood. Therefore, there is in both cases an instability pointing to the difficulty of achieving the balance of a sustained tension: *Four Quartets* bends towards the authority of religious experience, to which artistic impulses submit, and *A Portrait of the Artist* proclaims the superiority of art in an aestheticist rejection of the continuity of religious tradition. In this respect these texts are the poles of an opposition, despite their convergence at fundamental points, and the terms of this opposition determine how convincingly articulated we see the mutual requirement of the sacred and the aesthetic that the texts involve.

A first response is to acknowledge that the terms of this opposition (an affirmation of one notion at the expense of the other in each case) count against a tension that the texts maintain with some of their own presuppositions: with the affirmation of the creative impulse in *Four Quartets*, and with the pervasion of tradition in *A Portrait of the Artist*. Thus, to the extent to which this tension

cannot be resolved, in spite or because of the attempted opposition, these texts invite us to rethink some of the foundations of art and religion, in a Nietzschean fashion, through a resort to a single conceptual framework.

6.1. Religious Commitment vs. Aestheticism

What first strikes us is not the convergence of *Four Quartets* and *A Portrait of the Artist*, but a distinct contrast of attitudes: there is the starkest contrast between the humility of Eliot's lyrical voice and the boldness of Stephen. In *Four Quartets* poetry is presented as an instrument for the affirmation of something greater, as an instrument of self-denial:

> The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
>
> Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.[1]

The negative tone in talking of the human condition and human endeavours to apprehend reality appears throughout the poems, conveying a mood of pessimism that rejoices in dwelling in the negative:

> And what you do not know is the only thing you know
>
> And what you own is what you do not own
>
> And where you are is where you are not.[2]

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[1] Eliot, 'East Coker, II', in *Collected Poems*, p. 199.

This negative view of human life, imposed by an emphasis on the ascetic elements of the Christian religion, is regarded by F. R. Leavis as an inconsistency:

> Eliot's kind of 'humility', consistently believed in, amounts to nihilism. But he is not, of course, consistent [...]. Even when there is no conclusive evidence, one suspects in cases of such anti-human 'spirituality' that there is a compensating worldiness. But the inconsistency that stares us in the face is his seeking to establish the inevitability of his pondered negation by the exercise of intensely skilled human creativity — his own as a poet.[3]

If we agree with these views we have to conclude that Eliot's artistic success counts against a religious view dissociated from an alignment with an aesthetic recreation of life. For the kind of spiritual reality that *Four Quartets* tries to attain, against its own poetic success, is often placed out of life, thus subscribing to the characteristic nihilism that Nietzsche sees in Christian thought:

> the reality that Eliot seeks to apprehend being spiritual, he assumes that the spiritual must be thought of as the absolute 'other' — the antithetically and excludingly non-human [...]. The real to be apprehended is nothing. It is the postulated otherness, the only relation

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[2] Eliot, 'East Coker. III', in *Collected Poems*, p. 201.

[3] Leavis, *The Living Principle*, p. 215.

> to which that can be conceived for human nullity is one of conscious utter abjectness, utter impotence, utter nullity.[4]

The placing of spiritual value in a transcendent realm to which there is no direct access is a well-known gesture, and finds its source in the nihilistic affirmation of negativity that lies at the basis of the life-negating discourses, among which Nietzsche places Christianity itself. To the extent to which Eliot is engaged in the negative, ascetic attitude that Christianity legitimises, he is keeping at a distance from Nietzsche's artistic metaphysics, and he is also reinforcing an opposition between *Four Quartets* and *A Portrait of the Artist*. In his concern to apprehend the third term beyond the immanence of life and death, since

> that which is only living
> Can only die,[5]

Eliot resorts to the Christian tradition of pessimism about the human condition and to the affirmation of an unattainable transcendence defined by opposition to the earthly world. Yet this conception is not consistent with the celebration of poetic creativity that the text tacitly (and often explicitly) asserts. Such an inconsistency prompts Leavis's question:

> how could 'spiritual reality', for the apprehending of which Eliot (thus involuntarily conceding the point) uses the word 'conscious' be a

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[4] Leavis, *The Living Principle*, p. 203.

[5] Eliot, 'Burnt Norton, V', in *Collected Poems*, p. 194.

> reality for us, or anything but a conventionally empty phrase, unless apprehended out of life, in which we are, and in terms of our human livingness?[6]

Leavis finds a satisfactory explanation for this paradox by appealing to the creative nature of language, and of poetic language in particular, which grants us a community of meaning and an access to spiritual truth. Eliot loses his own selfhood and transcends the enclosure of his human condition as soon as he embarks in a literary creative process, both by the communal essence of language, which no individual can appropriate, and by the impersonality of artistic creation:

> when the artist is creatively successful the creativity to which the achievement belongs is not his, though, while transcending the person he is, it needed his devoted and supremely responsible service. The creative power and purpose don't reside within his personal self-enclosure; they are not his property or in his possession. He serves them, not they him.[7]

Once the individual behind the lyric voice of Eliot is taken to be, in Nietzsche's terminology, an illusion, the necessary illusion that, according to the theory in *The Birth of Tragedy*, lyric poetry uses to grant us an insight into reality, then the claims that belong to such an individual can be said to be alien to the higher truth that the poems state, and to stand in contradiction with it: Eliot

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[6] Leavis, *The Living Principle*, p. 181.

[7] Leavis, *The Living Principle*, p. 185.

is blind to the contradiction that he enacts and is. What he believes in supremely (the evidence being the poetry itself) is the taxing human responsibility represented by his devotion to his art — the art to which his genius has dedicated him. What he *asserts* about his spiritual quest is worth little; the questing that matters is inseparable from the arduous creativity.[8]

Therefore, the recognition of the literary value of *Four Quartets* involves the adoption of a frame of mind within which the individual is surpassed by the impersonality of creation and of language itself, and within which spiritual value appears inseparably linked to the artistic loss of the self and to the life of which the artistic process is part, rather than to the affirmation of an irreconcilable transcendence:

> only out of life and by the living, who are *of* it — of the life that is inseparable from the creativity intensively manifested by the artist — can spiritual values be recognised, served and maintained. To posit, as Eliot does, human impotence and nullity is to face oneself with the void, with emptiness, with nothingness.[9]

These statements seem to reinforce the Nietzschean oppositions, aligning spirituality (as one of the conceptions of the sacred) with the loss of the self in artistic creativity, while reserving for the asceticism of Christianity the morbid

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[8] Leavis, *The Living Principle*, p. 198.

[9] Leavis, *The Living Principle*, p. 205.

delight in the affirmation of nothingness; through these oppositions Eliot's own contradictions become clearer:

> in demonstrating his supreme respect for his creativity, the artist demonstrates his allegiance to what he knows to be other than himself. The demonstration is the assertion of spiritual values, spiritual significance, spiritual authority; the resulting evidence their vindication. In his witness to the disastrousness of today's triumphant philistinism Eliot performed a great service to life and humanity; in his assertion of human abjectness and nullity he denied his implicit affirmation [...].[10]

However, just as Nietzsche's formulations yield to more than interpretations that preserve dualisms, the engagement with spiritual values in *Four Quartets* does not have to be searched for away from Eliot's Christian beliefs, nor does religion in *Four Quartets* respond only to a modern spirit that has lost touch with the original sacredness and has to recover it through an irreconcilable aesthetic activity. Even if an opposition to *A Portrait of the Artist* qualifies *Four Quartets* as a text that privileges religious experience, this distinctive trait is not a ground on which to justify a dissociation between the sacred and the aesthetic within the poems, claiming either a submission of a poetic project to a religious aim or, as Leavis does, an affirmation of spiritual value *in spite of* anti-aesthetic religious views. That this dissociation cannot be claimed to exist

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[10] Leavis, *The Living Principle*, p. 205.

will become clearer through an exploration of Eliot's blending of mythic past and Christian tradition (see 6.2, below).

First let us see in what way *A Portrait of the Artist* stands at the other end of the opposition: if humility is the resting place of Eliot's spiritual quest, arguably to the detriment of his aesthetic purposes, for Stephen boldness is the precondition of his artistic consecration, manifested from his early years in an attitude of detachment from and also of challenge to social bonds, all to the effect of enhancing his own consciousness as an individual, as someone who stands apart and knows no humble renouncement, but no feeling of communion either. Stephen hears the voices that tie him to his family, his land and his religion, but cannot reconcile them with a spiritual longing that only finds rest in loneliness or in his own creations:

> in the profane world, as he foresaw, a worldly voice would bid him raise up his father's fallen state by his labours and, meanwhile, the voice of his school comrades urged him to be a decent fellow, to shield others from blame or to beg them off and to do his best to get free days for the school. And it was the din of all these hollowsounding voices that made him halt irresolutely in the pursuit of phantoms. He gave them ear only for a time but he was happy only when he was far from them, beyond their call, alone or in the company of phantasmal comrades.[11]

[11] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 88-9.

In his path towards art, Stephen finds in religion and the church no possible ally: the virtues of the priest could not be further away from the artistic affirmation of life that he seeks. Of a priest Stephen thinks that he

> had remained ungraced by aught of saintly or of prelatic beauty. Nay, his very soul had waxed old in that service without growing towards light and beauty or spreading abroad a sweet odour of her sanctity — a mortified will no more responsive to the thrill of its obedience than was to the thrill of love or combat his aging body, spare and sinewy, greyed with a silverpointed down.[12]

Thus discontinuity with the past, with tradition and with religion is for Stephen a precondition of a life that seeks to apprehend aesthetic truth. The boldness of the young artist, who wants to break all the ties that constrain the richness of his individual spirit, stands in opposition to the mature poet who preaches humility and puts art to the service of revelation: *A Portrait of the Artist* and *Four Quartets* are in this respect the expressions of contrary intentions. Yet their points of convergence are as relevant as their dissimilarities, since they constitute a restatement of the link between sacredness and the aesthetic not only in the terms already described in previous pages, but also in those resulting from the oppositions just pointed to. In the case of *Four Quartets*, this essential link is now stated, beyond religious asceticism or poetic immanence, through a resort to the mythical character of Christianity and the musical quality of lyric poetry. In the case of *A Portrait of the Artist*, it is stated, beyond sterile

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[12] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 200.

aestheticism or artistic selfhood, through the portrayal of a communion with reality in the form of an 'epiphany', of a manifestation whose perception is qualified as an experience of the sacred.

6.2. Mythic Christianity and Mythic Consciousness

The mythical conception of the past determines the engagement of *Four Quartets* with tradition, and, by extension, with the Christian tradition to which they adhere. The Christian references already alluded to in chapter 5 are interwoven with a conception of time and nature that unveils not only a mythic interpretation of Christianity but also its reconciliation with what seems to deny the two central Christian ideas of linearity and asceticism. The reflection on time takes up a great part of the poems, but from the very beginning it points to the present as the privileged place from which to understand temporality:

> What might have been is an abstraction
> Remaining a perpetual possibility
> Only in a world of speculation.
> What might have been and what has been
> Point to one end, which is always present.[13]

[13] Eliot, 'Burnt Norton, I', in *Collected Poems*, p. 189.

Actuality is valued more than speculation, the present more than the past or what is only possible; yet Eliot does not dare affirm at this stage the primacy of the present with all its consequences, for fear that

> If all time is eternally present
>
> All time is unredeemable.[14]

Not many lines below, however, the step is taken, and the eternity of the present *within* the present is seen to be the only possible redemption: because time can only be eternal in its contingency, in its being eternally present, only through time can time be transcended:

> Time past and time future
>
> Allow but a little consciousness.
>
> To be conscious is not to be in time
>
> But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
>
> The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
>
> The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
>
> Be remembered; involved with past and future.
>
> Only through time time is conquered.[15]

Present and actuality contain transcendence within themselves, just as the recalled images have to be involved in some kind of present to belong to the

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[14] Eliot, 'Burnt Norton, I', in *Collected Poems*, p. 189

[15] Eliot, 'Burnt Norton, II', in *Collected Poems*, p. 192.

immortality of the eternal flux of time, in which the present eternally is and ceases to be.

This privileging of the present is also to be found as the result of Nietzsche's theory of the eternal return, even if attained through a different path; the present there acquires the value of the eternal, since it will be repeated endlessly in exactly the same form, and this is a motive of rejoicing for noble natures: those who seek to affirm the immediacy of life without ascribing transcendence to a realm alien to life itself. The link between circularity and the eternity of present time can also be traced in *Four Quartets*: real time is not the time that can be measured, but a time that surpasses past and future and dissolves distinctions:

The tolling bell

Measures time not our time, rung by the unhurried

Ground swell, a time

Older than the time of chronometers, older

Than time counted by anxious worried women

Lying awake, calculating the future,

Trying to unweave, unwind, unravel

And piece together the past and the future,

Between midnight and dawn, when the light is all deception,

The future futureless, before the morning watch

When time stops and time is never ending;

And the ground swell, that is and was from the beginning,

Clangs

The bell.[16]

The bell stands as a particularly ambiguous symbol, since it evokes both the a-temporality of spiritual life, to which the sacred place of the church is devoted, and the only constant instrument of measure in country life, where otherwise the cycles would stretch and shrink according to nature's.

The cyclical structure of the real, eternal in its contingency, endlessly becoming and ceasing to be present, corresponds to the cycles of nature. Eliot delights in this correspondence in the following passage as much as Nietzsche does in his evoking of mythic times:

Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
Mirth of those long since under earth
Nourishing the corn. Keeping time,
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
As in their living in the living seasons
The time of the seasons and the constellations
The time of milking and the time of harvest
The time of the coupling of man and woman
And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
Eating and drinking. Dung and death.[17]

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[16] Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages, I', in *Collected Poems*, p. 206.

[17] Eliot, 'East Coker, I', in *Collected Poems*, p. 197.

Here the dark and crude tones reinforce the authenticity of an original and primal experience, where human life is tributary to the natural cycles, and these in turn become living entities. This experience puts us in touch with a primordial sacredness, with the celebrations of the festivals and with an eternal rhythm that arises from birth and death, from generation and corruption. The dead live on because of their mortality, not in spite of it; sacredness belongs to nature, to 'The life of significant soil',[18] and to the everyday experience of it. That this passage is meant to be a contrast to the harmonic vision of divine order that the poems seek to attain is only confirmed by an interpretation that narrows considerably the scope of Eliot's poetic views. The unpleasantness conveyed by these lines does not necessarily imply a negative judgement of ancient feelings: rather, it opens our modern notions of sacredness to the crudity and ambiguity of their origins.[19]

The mythical resonances of cyclical time in nature are recaptured in the evocation of the ecstasy of laughter and generation, offering a further challenge to the Christian ideas of linearity and asceticism:

> The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy
> Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony
> Of death and birth.[20]

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[18] Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages, V', in *Collected Poems*, p. 213.

[19] Yet for a view that supports a negative valuation on the part of the author, see A. D. Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot Poet* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 208-11.

[20] Eliot, 'East Coker, III', in *Collected Poems*, p. 201.

And since nature is the source of the sacred, the realm of cyclical temporality from which eternity springs, as well as the realm of endless generation of life from which transcendence arises, gods inhabit nature just as the Titanic forces that gave birth to the Olympian lineage. Nature retains its enchantment for Eliot, against the effects of secularisation, and within a literary enactment of a spiritual quest:

> I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
> Is a strong brown god — sullen, untamed and intractable,
> Patient to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier;
> Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;
> Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.
> The problem once solved, the brown god is almost forgotten
> By the dweller in cities — ever, however, implacable.
> Keeping his seasons and rages, destroyer, reminder
> Of what men choose to forget. Unhonoured, unpropitiated
> By worshippers of the machine, but waiting, watching and waiting.[21]

Through the primacy of the present, inscribed in the eternal return of the cyclical time of an enchanted nature, Eliot engages in a mythic mode of thought that once again adds a mythic character to the Christian impetus of the poems. Christianity appears, within *Four Quartets*, with the misty quality of ancient myths.

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[21] Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages, I', in *Collected Poems*, p. 205.

In a parallel way, Joyce adds a mythical quality to the Christian references in *A Portrait of the Artist*, not least by the story's superposition to the ancient myth of Icarus' fall; Stephen's fall is only adumbrated within the story, but it is also from this perspective a religious fall: Dedalus brings as many mythic resonances as Saint Stephen does, and the protagonist stands in the convergence of both worlds. The mythic texture that pervades the novel is not altogether alien to Stephen's own awareness:

> it shocked him to find in the outer world a trace of what he had deemed till then a brutish and individual malady of his own mind. His recent monstrous reveries came thronging into his memory. They too had sprung up before him, suddenly and furiously, out of mere words.[22]

The external world follows the pattern of the imagination, just as in prophecy and mythic narrative the order of words prefigures and structures experience.

In contrast with this shared and often unacknowledged awareness of the mythic character of religious narratives (both in *A Portrait of the Artist* and *Four Quartets*), other works by Joyce and Eliot display a very different attitude towards the aesthetic possibilities of myth. *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, for example, participate in a foregrounding of the structuring power of myth. While *Ulysses*, in one of its intelligent readings, reveals a deliberate and detailed mirroring of its Greek counterpart, *The Waste Land* integrates a plurality of lyric voices and traditions that through their free interaction expect to raise a

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[22] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 95.

poetic experience in the reader. Such highly stylised and intellectualist gestures result in a loss of the appeal of the mythic voices themselves, which become all levelled and innocuous under the ordering pressure of a conscious artistic intellect. Eliot's sympathy for this modernist method of literary composition, shared with Joyce, is well known:

> In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him [...]. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.[23]

However, Eliot suspected that it was also necessary for ordering and shaping structures to remain implicit in order to retain their effectiveness; although in a different context, he declares: 'what I want is a literature which should be *un*consciously, rather than deliberately and defiantly, Christian'.[24] And yet what he does not seem to realise is that for a mythic narrative to remain unconscious, that is, full of possibilities, its narrator cannot step outside it, cannot aestheticise it. For this reason the mythic impetus of *Four Quartets* can be said to be more subtle and yet richer than that of *The Waste Land* (where Eliot stepped outside any commitment to the mythical voices), just as the same can be said of *A Portrait of the Artist* in relation to *Ulysses*.

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[23] Eliot, '*Ulysses*, Order and Myth', in Frank Kermode (ed.), *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1975; repr. 1987), p. 177.

[24] Eliot, 'Religion and Literature', in *Selected Prose*, p. 100.

Thus the engagement in mythic consciousness is not properly a mode of consciousness, but an opening of the conscious individual, through his conscious choices, to a consciousness that surpasses him. Such a frame of mind transcends the aesthetic realm and determines attitudes towards religious belief and moral value.

The mythic frame of mind that *A Portrait of the Artist* and *Four Quartets* share re-establishes a link with a mode of consciousness in which the intellect is not perverted by reason: Stephen's thinking incorporates the picture of an enchanted, intelligent nature, recurrent in the novel:

> then there flew hither and thither shapeless thoughts from Swedenborg on the correspondence of birds to things of the intellect and of how the creatures of the air have their knowledge and know their times and seasons because they, unlike man, are in the order of their life and have not perverted that order by reason.[25]

Also, this mythic frame of mind enters a conflict with questions about the dual nature of belief, whose unanswerability from this perspective is at this point insufficient for Stephen:

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[25] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 244. For an exploitation of the associations ~~pointed~~ prompted by this instance of mythic consciousness in *A Portrait of the Artist*, see Roland Bates, 'The Correspondence of Birds to Things of the Intellect', in *James Joyce Quarterly*, no. 2 (Summer 1965), pp. 281-290.

— Do you believe in the Eucharist? Cranly asked.

— I do not, Stephen said.

— Do you disbelieve, then?

— I neither believe in it nor disbelieve in it, Stephen answered.[26]

The fact that neither literal belief nor its negation are available to Stephen could have been regarded as a consequence of an aesthetic attitude towards religion. Eliot tells us that 'if you can read poetry as poetry, you will "believe" in Dante's theology exactly as you believe in the physical reality of his journey; that is, you suspend both belief and disbelief'.[27] Therefore, an aesthetic attitude that participates in mythic consciousness suspends the truth-value of the literal belief in a particular creed. And indeed the mythic frame of mind has been argued to be behind Eliot's surpassing of modern scepticism:

> the mythic method made possible for Eliot a kind of participation in Christianity in spite of the skepticism of nineteenth-century naturalism and the more pervasive skepticism of the early twentieth century which had discredited religious belief. Just as the structures of ancient myths and primitive rituals could serve as patterns of action and emotional response for poetry and drama, so the refinement of sensibility and organization of experience provided by the myths and rituals of modern

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[26] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 260.

[27] Eliot, quoted in Warner, 'Philosophical Poetry: The Case of *Four Quartets*', *Philosophy and Literature*, 10, 2, 1986, p. 244.

> religion can function as an ordering of daily living and a philosophy of life.[28]

From this, myth appears as a structural truth, as an organising pattern that yields to actualisation, whose original unity has now to be experienced in either artistic or religious manifestations. What is really important is not the contemporary actualisation of the myth, but the structure which subsists, and which corresponds to an irreducible pattern of experience. When the structure accumulates all importance the content becomes peripheral, and the question of literal belief is blurred or does not even arise:

> the nature of the mythic method, in fact, *prevents* the possibility of literal belief, of faith, in the myths and rituals that it reclaims. The simultaneity of past and present which must occur in the mythic method when the structure of ancient myth is incorporated into contemporary experience results in the holding of two points of view, past and present, simultaneously.[29]

This view of myth as structure, as a pattern of universal usefulness whose truth is its validity (its non-dependence on the truth of its manifestations), seems to resolve the paradox of Modernist mythopoeia. The third point, beyond naivity or scepticism, would not be a willing self-deception, an acting as if the ideals

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[28] Skaff, *The Philosophy of T. S. Eliot*, p.115.

[29] Skaff, *The Philosophy of T. S. Eliot*, p. 115.

were true, but a conscious embracing of mythic structures in view of their validity:

> the third point of view that unites the mythic pattern and contemporary life, a past faith and a modern skepticism that finds it no longer true, is 'mythic consciousness': a *conscious* living of a myth no longer a faith.[30]

Since behind the myths lie structures whose validity overcomes the truth-value of their narratives, the aesthetically created character of the religious and moral values that myths present to us is not an obstacle for their abiding power: Modernist literature does not urge us to indulge in a self-deceptive attitude; it only turns our scepticism upside down, transforming the impossibility of belief into a privileged awareness to which different worldviews offer their structural truth.

These ideas would certainly be in accord with Nietzsche's antiessentialism and with his relational notion of truth. Truth is for Nietzsche always reducible to something other than itself, ultimately to the will to power,[31] and our experience of a world artistically created owes its consistency to this very act of creation:

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[30] Skaff, *The Philosophy of T. S. Eliot*, p. 116.

[31] See Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), paragraph 534, p. 290.

for Nietzsche, the external world we find ourselves in is literally shaped by us [...]. It is only through the creation of [...] a world of comparatively stable things and 'identical cases' that the contents of our experience assume the order and regularity for prediction and control.[32]

However, things that are only comparatively stable and that ultimately depend on our own artistic creation cannot fully play the role of substantive entities upon which to base true statements: Nietzsche's furious antiessentialism lends itself to paradoxes that invalidate it, including the paradox of the impossibility of plurality,[33] thus denying a prerequisite for the very formulation of an antiessentialist statement.

The difficulty of holding a purely relational notion of reality and a structural notion of truth finds a parallel in the loss of authenticity within an aesthetic view that lacks commitment to the myths it reproduces: the purely structural and external use of myth in *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* lacks the force of a relationship within the realm of belief and disbelief. On the contrary, the tacit engagement with the mythic dimension of Christianity and its pagan resonances in *Four Quartets* and *A Portrait of the Artist* flows from the stability of a committed position: this is ultimately why *Four Quartets* offers the ease of a resting place and *A Portrait of the Artist* constitutes an episode of a tragic drama. In both cases the intention of the authors to present the lyric and the

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[32] Peter Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, (Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 280.

[33] For an analysis of this paradox, see Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, pp. 282-3.

narrative voices respectively assenting to, and dissenting from, a commitment to a Christian attitude, allows for a fluid deployment of mythic resonances that is lacking in a conscious, archaeological rephrasing of the mythic past. Thus the tragic mythic dimension of Stephen's demythologising in *A Portrait of the Artist* and the mythic resonances of religious affirmation in *Four Quartets* are two successful, though opposed, instances of Modernist mythopoeia.

6.3. Continuity vs. Rupture: Two Attitudes before Tradition

Eliot's favouring of an original experience does not imply a discontinuity, a mock re-enactment in a secluded world that dismisses a tradition other than the origin. It is only by appealing to his respect for tradition that we can accommodate the mythopoeic impetus of Eliot's poetry, its commitment to an original experience, within a work that thinks of itself as fundamentally Christian:

> And what there is to conquer
> By strength and submission, has already been discovered
> Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
> To emulate — but there is no competition —
> There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
> And found and lost again; and now, under conditions

That seem unpropitious.[34]

Thus our present is not essentially removed from the truth that tradition incompletely states over and over again. Through our understanding of tradition, including a Christian tradition that does not dismiss the aesthetic power of its own myths, we can engage in a view of reality that, by keeping the memory of the ineffable, of what Nietzsche called the 'Dionysiac wisdom', is aware both of the need, and of the precariousness, of its own mechanisms of representation, thus maintaining a tension that renders reality as both sacred and object of aesthetic contemplation:

I have said before

That the past experience revived in the meaning

Is not the experience of one life only

But of many generations — not forgetting

Something that is probably quite ineffable:

The backward look behind the assurance

Of recorded history, the backward half-look

Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.[35]

The primitive terror is the original experience of the unbearableness of reality, encapsulated by Nietzsche in the 'wisdom of Silenus', the 'Dionysiac wisdom' that tells us that 'the best of all things is [...] not to be born, not to *be*, to be

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[34] Eliot, 'East Coker. V', in *Collected Poems*, p. 203.

[35] Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages II', in *Collected Poems*, pp. 208-9.

nothing'.[36] This primordial negative experience of life has its roots in the original fear that nature inspires, 'behind the assurance / Of recorded history', and that places man at the mercy of an overwhelming power of destruction that he feels to be threatening for his own experience. Within the double nature inherent to sacredness, the dark side of boundless power remained for the Greeks linked to the ancient realm of the Titans, whose sombre qualities were surpassed by the radiance of the Olympian deities; for Christianity, the dark side of the divine, the awe-inspiring power of the wrath of God, is linked to the fallenness of the created world, which has to be redeemed through Christ's Incarnation and Passion. The memory of this unredeemed world, of frightful sacredness in a boundless nature, can be revived through a continuity in the experience of many generation, to which Eliot appeals in his engagement with a tradition that presupposes experience in its meaning. The past experience is not only remembered, but experienced again through the meaning of a continuous handing over between generations.

Yet tradition is not by itself a warrantor of wisdom, and the past does not attain its authority just through a sequential priority: the continuity with the past has to be sanctioned by a certain selflessness:

> Do not let me hear
>
> Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,
>
> Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,

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[36] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 22.

Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.[37]

Thus the notions of community, belonging and selflessness are attached to an authentic experience that the ancients did not always have. Here again those who forgot an original fear seem to have lost touch with an essential continuity. In their 'fear of fear' they forgot not only 'the primitive terror', but also the fundamental experience of community, which for the Greeks took precisely the form of Dionysiac 'frenzy' and 'possession'. Humility, the Christian virtue that in the *Quartets* appears as a resting place in the individual experience of time, is traced back in view of this passage to the ancient religious states from which the renouncement of the self thus appears linked to the rapture of the ancient cults. There is an unquestionable value in the abandonment of self-concern in order to be one with the deity and with our fellow men, but this belonging, this inter-penetration, is not here approached through references to Christian humility, charity of communion: rather, with these references in the background, 'fear', 'frenzy' and 'possession' bring us back to the world of the ancient rituals, as a test for our valuation of tradition and for our own understanding of the continuity that is to be searched for.

Such a continuity, grounded on the pervasiveness of Christianity in Western culture, incorporates for Eliot its own critics:

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[37] Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 199.

> an individual may not believe that the Christian faith is true, and yet what he says, and makes, and does, will all spring out of his heritage of Christian culture and depend upon that culture for its meaning. Only a Christian culture could have produced a Voltaire or a Nietzsche.[38]

Thus Voltaire's or Nietzsche's criticism of their inherited traditions can often be seen as a striving for greater faithfulness to those tradition themselves. If a continuity is granted, their criticisms are incorporated to a movement that encompasses the quest for the always-elusive origin that Christianity both displaces and re-assumes. In this sense, Nietzsche's quest for the original authenticity of experience, away from the secularising power that Christianity contains within itself, restates an essential continuity with the past which is corroborated by Christianity's own mythopoeic force. It does not then come as a surprise that fundamental notions about 'cultural health' and the nature of collective experience present close similarities in Eliot's and Nietzsche's views on cultural history.

Both Nietzsche and Eliot conceive of culture as an organic being that cannot be fully detached from the material conditions of its birth and growth. For Eliot

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[38] T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948; repr. 1965), p. 122.

> what is wanted is not to restore a vanished, or to revive a vanishing culture under modern conditions which make it impossible, but to grow a contemporary culture from the old roots.[39]

Similarly, for Nietzsche,

> in the weary exhaustion of contemporary culture, [...] we seek in vain for a single vigorously branching root, a patch of fertile and healthy soil: nowhere is there anything but dust, sand, petrification, drought.[40]

It is not accidental the we find here a resort to images taken from the organic world to characterise culture in opposition to the barrenness of the inorganic. In both cases there is an awareness of the specificity of cultural constructs, of the irreducibility of their structure and of their ineluctable relationship to the realm of nature. The 'old roots' are for Nietzsche classic antiquity, but for Eliot also include our Christian past. Nietzsche seems to ignore at a certain point the fluidity of mythical representation, and its dynamic of fertile intercourse. Thus Nietzsche does not emphasise the mythopoeic aspects of Christianity, but its alignment with the Socratic secularising force of which it is an instance:

> let us imagine a culture without a secure and sacred primal site, condemned to exhaust every possibility and feed wretchedly on all

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[39] Eliot, *Notes...*, p. 53.

[40] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 98.

> other cultures — there we have our present age, the product of that Socratism bent on the destruction of Myth.[41]

However, the organic imagery persists, and culture is still seen as a living organism that has to be nourished and is dependent on natural conditions of existence. Against references to planning, engineering or conscious structuring, Eliot also returns to this field of characterisation:

> culture is something that must grow; you cannot build a tree, you can only plant it, and care for it, and wait for it to mature in its due time.[42]

The unfolding of this imagery goes in Nietzsche along very similar lines, even though the fundamental divergence is found again in what counts as native or alien in a myth:

> it seems hardly possible to graft an alien myth on to a native tree without damaging the tree beyond repair. The tree may perhaps be strong and healthy enough to reject the foreign element after a terrible struggle, but it is generally consumed, becoming ailing and atrophied or exhausting itself in morbid growth.[43]

From this words it seems clear that Nietzsche's position rejects a mythical of these continuity between Antiquity and Christianity, and yet the meaningfulness of

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[41] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 110.

[42] Eliot, *Notes...*, p. 119.

[43] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 112.

his attacks and his reversals implicitly assumes such a continuity. Perhaps the aesthetic talent of Wagner was sharper than Nietzsche's when he had no difficulty in eventually passing on from *Tristan und Isolde* to *Parsifal*.

In any case, it is significant that both Eliot and Nietzsche resort to an organic conception of culture, in the image of a growing tree, and that by doing so they both distance themselves from rationalist conceptions of social organisation. In fact, there is in both cases an underlying conservative social view, since the members of the organic community that they envisage stand in essential and asymmetrical relationship to each other, and their links are not of a contractual nature. Externally this is manifested in Nietzsche's nostalgia for the aristocratic past and in Eliot's conservative political views.

In a further parallel way, if Nietzsche extends his aesthetic concern up to reclaiming for art the lost sacredness of ancient myths, Eliot arrives at a similar point through his call for a blend of religious and aesthetic sensibility:

> aesthetic sensibility must be extended into spiritual perception, and spiritual perception must be extended into aesthetic sensibility and disciplined taste before we are qualified to pass judgement upon decadence or diabolism or nihilism in art. To judge a work of art by artistic or by religious standards, to judge a religion by religious or artistic standards should come in the end to the same thing.[44]

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[44] Eliot, *Notes...*, p. 30.

This convergence of judgements reinforces the idea of a continuity between art and religion based on historical continuity: the continuous thread that links us to the past allows for the re-experiencing of a unity that from contemporary perspectives appears to be only an anachronism. But 'the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence';[45] our relationship with our past history is not only defined by distance, but also by immediacy, and our present valuations necessarily incorporate a consideration of the tradition to which they belong:

> no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists.[46]

As a consequence of the logical priority of the context of tradition (the inescapable continuity where we always find ourselves), the features of individuality, originality and personal imprint are relativised and regarded as only secondarily artistic. The individual author has in some sense to disappear behind his work in order for artistic value to arise: the affirmation of individuality and the value of artistic products are incompatible on the face of the inescapable context that artistic tradition constitutes. Therefore, the individual has to be sacrificed:

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[45] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920; repr. 1960), p. 44.

[46] Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', p. 44.

> what happens [to an artist in artistic creation] is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.[47]

Once again, we find here the opposition between the positing of individuality and the artistic insight into the boundlessness of reality, mediated by the structure of sacrifice. This opposition was used by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* in his discussion of lyric poetry, where the personal character of the lyric voice was taken to be part of an illusory mechanism of representation that allowed the poet to express the ultimate truths of non-individuated reality.[48] This theory is even corroborated by Joyce, although in the words of a Stephen still tributary to some Romantic notions:

> the lyrical form is in fact the simplest verbal vesture of an instant of emotion, a rhythmical cry such as ages ago cheered on the man who pulled at the oar or dragged stones up a slope. He who utters it is more conscious of the instant of emotion than of himself as feeling emotion.[49]

The self-forgetfulness of the lyric poet is then emphasised, even if the concept of emotion is hard to detach from the notion of a personal, Romantic self whose unity of inner world is ultimately the source of poetic value; yet the lyrical cry

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[47] Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', p. 47.

[48] See Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, pp. 29-30.

[49] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 232.

has to be uttered in a state in which consciousness of the emotion-experiencing self is lost, emotion thus being something that escapes the boundaries of the personal individual.

The continuity with the past that results in the impersonality of artistic creation is for Eliot part of a complex temporal structure, in which the dynamicity of the temporal flux is irreducible to the instants of its apprehension, while the present moment retains its paradoxical privilege in the midst of a web of interconnections:

> Time past and time future
>
> What might has been and what has been
>
> Point to one end, which is always present.[50]

The sequences of both past and future share the same end (not a point of intersection, but an end, the final stage of a progression), and this end is their own impossibility, a perpetual moment that is more than 'the present' in its being 'always present'; moreover, the non-actualised possibilities of 'what might have been', which could open the unfulfilled past to the unpredictable future, are aligned with the immobility of recorded past, of 'what has been', adding to the fluidity of the distinctions.

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[50] Eliot, 'Burnt Norton, I', in *Collected Poems*, p. 190.

The temporality of Stephen's experience also requires a reflection on the elusive boundaries of memory, actuality and expectation:

> [...]she remembers the time of her childhood — and mine if I was ever a child. The past is consumed in the present and the present is living only because it brings forth the future.[51]

Nevertheless, Stephen constantly rebels against a continuous temporality (he does not reappropriate his childhood, but forgets it). Stephen's artistic vocation requires a rupture: he has to create the yet uncreated, and he cannot rely on the continuity of his own experience or in that of an authoritative tradition. In *Stephen Hero*, Stephen declares: 'No esthetic theory [...] is of any value which investigates with the aid of the lantern of tradition'.[52] The context talks of the irreconcilability of diverse cultural traditions in relation to beauty, although it does not conclude with a relativist position: on the contrary, Stephen finds in the act of aesthetic apprehension the element that escapes the disconcerting plurality of aesthetic traditions. The mistrust for the illuminating force of the content of an artistic legacy is here clearly stated in aid of a theoretical enquiry that looks for the essence of art, but it is also endorsed by the general attitude of Stephen in regard to his own artistic aspirations. The artistic realm is the alternative for Stephen's dissatisfaction with his inherited country, family and religion. Only by conceiving of art as a detached and independent realm could

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[51] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 273.

[52] James Joyce, *Stephen Hero: Part of the First Draft of 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'*, ed. by Theodor Spencer (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944; repr. 1969), p. 217.

he devote all his enthusiasm to a life-project that would counterbalance the sterility of what he perceived to be his past experience.

At this point the autobiographical parallels seem to reach a particular accuracy, pointing to Joyce's own voluntary exile, but they also throw light on how literary distance allowed Joyce perhaps more ambiguity that the inevitable definiteness of his personal decisions. The boldness of Stephen in the *Portrait*, and his relentless desire of a decisive rupture, are submerged in a narrative that questions them in a way that the earlier text of *Stephen Hero* does not. Not only is the protagonist in the *Portrait* closer to an understandable humanity, but also the signs of rebellion and dismissal are structured in a more significant manner. Stephen in the form of an unsympathetic figure that rejects his past in favour of a rebellious aesthetic priesthood appears only towards the end of the novel, when the weight of the complexity of his earlier experiences already prompts a negative judgement on his attitudes of detachment. The entries in his diary contribute to a dramatic effect, that reaches its peak in the very lack of conclusion of its movement. Stephen's gesture rendered mistaken is left outside the plot of the story to retain all its tragic force and its ambiguity, but it is then associated with the unfortunate destiny of the son of the mythic Dedalus, the bold Icarus whom Ovid recounts and with whom Stephen identifies at the very beginning of his flight. Thus at the end of the novel the mythic story that remained either in the background or condensed in the exteriority of an epigraph suggests itself as the narrative that disambiguates Stephen's relation to tradition. Only along this path can we account differently for a rupture that

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otherwise stands in clear contrast with Eliot's immersion in the nurturing flow of a continuous past.

6.4. Narrativity vs. Selflessness in Music

An insistence on the recognition of the illusoriness of identity as an insight into the depth of reality, is kept by the pervasion of the musical throughout the poems, since in *Four Quartets*, as in *The Birth of Tragedy*, music is the realm of the loss of the individual will. This musical pervasion goes from the connotations of the general title to the structure of the poems, in which the themes are recurrent and developed as if in a musical exposition:

> the themes are both stated, as themes are in music, and asked as questions, as themes are in philosophy: questions about time and eternity, history and the Incarnation, sanctity and poetry, the whole and the new, the opaqueness and the transparency of personal experience. The musical themes receive a philosophical extension, and the philosophical questions receive a musical elaboration.[53]

Music is also present in the complex allusions to the relationship between movement and stillness, and presupposed in the constant references to the dance that the stillness becomes and to the dance that the ancients perform in communion with nature and with each other. Music is, finally, characterised as a Dionysiac experience of possession when associated with the will-less state of the intersection of time and timelessness:

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[53] Buckley, *Poetry and the Sacred*, p. 222.

> music heard so deeply
>
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
>
> While the music lasts.[54]

The loss of the boundaries of individuality as a result of musical experience was already thematised in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche also being aware that the loss of the self inevitably prompted a general questioning of the notion of identity, and therefore recalling the essentially ambiguous thought of Heraclitus. In relation to his own national musical tradition, Nietzsche says that

> the liar and hypocrite should take care with German music, for in the whole of our culture it is the only pure, clear and cleansing fire-spirit from which and towards which, as in the teachings of the great Heraclitus of Ephesus, all things move in a double orbit.[55]

And if music is the Dionysiac force that defies self and identity, and *Four Quartets* are pervaded by a musical spirit, it makes perfect sense that Eliot should also refer to the Heraclitean contradictory discourse. Two of its fragments open the text as epigraphs, and the second, ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὠυτή ('the way up and the way down are one and the same'), is reformulated later in the text:

> And the way up is the way down, the way forward the way back,[56]

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[54] Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages, III', in *Collected Poems*, p. 213.

[55] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 95.

[56] Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages, III', in *Collected Poems*, p. 210.

thus inscribing the thought of non-identity and non-linearity in a text that has already proved its commitment to a musical rhythm and to a recognition of the enchantment of nature and the sacredness of its cycles of change. *Four Quartets*, without renouncing its Christian vocation, engages in a thought of contingency, showing the present, the cyclical and the mutable as the realms with which transcendence intermingles. Eliot takes the challenge that such a thought posits, and constructs within his text a positive rendering of change and mutability, in so far as through his poetry we are acquainted with the sacred force that contingency *as contingency* implies, in so far as his text is itself part of that music that lives and dies, that reaches a stillness through the pattern but does not renounce its temporal nature, and thus makes us be 'the music/ *While the music lasts*'.

To take this Heraclitean acknowledgement of contingency and temporality as pointing to a lack of achievement is to enclose Eliot's Christian views in an orthodoxy that his aesthetic talent does not contradict, but rather enlarges and problematises by reference to its ancient sacred sources. There is no need to say that Heraclitus' epigraph becomes for Eliot 'a dismissing judgement on life', that 'inescapably confined to a 'sphere of being' where there is no direction and no pattern, it is meaningless':[57] the aesthetic quality of the texts, as Leavis himself suggests, already rules out a negative judgement, that

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[57] Leavis, *The Living Principle*, p. 241.

could be based only on a failure to acknowledge the life-affirming character of artistic creation.

Within this artistic realm, the mutability of reality cannot be dissociated from a transcendent pattern, just as the contingency of everyday experience is illuminated by its reference to a set of fixed meanings. The way up and the way down of Heraclitus are thus in 'Burnt Norton' incorporated into an apparently meaningless personal experience:

> This is the one way, and the other
> Is the same, not in movement
> But abstention from movement.[58]

The immediate experience behind these lines is the double choice that Eliot had of descending to Gloucester Road Tube Station: by using the stairs or by using the lift.[59] However, his daily experience is not only a camouflaged anecdote behind a text that unfolds an impersonal speculation on the nature of time and movement: his experience is part of a continuum that incorporates prosaic and

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[58] Eliot, 'Burnt Norton, IV', in *Collected Poems*, p. 193.

[59] 'The setting of section III is the London Tube. Eliot travelled daily from Gloucester Road Station, whose two means of descent, by the stairs or by the lift, suggested to him the movement down and the "abstention from movement"' (Helen Gardner, *The Composition of 'Four Quartets'*, London: Faber & Faber, 1978, p. 86.). For a study (though not an exhaustive one) of the influence of Heraclitus 's thought on *Four Quartets*, see Merrel D. Clubb, 'The Heraclitean Element in Eliot's *Four Quartets*', in *Philological Quarterly*, 40 (January 1961), pp. 19-33.

exclusively personal details together with the deep meanings that articulate them. The plane of the ultimate significance of experience is then continuous with the ever-changing contents that constitute it: the text of Heraclitus is thus appropriate to be the basis of the recovered continuity between everyday life and the persistent pattern of meaning.

Superimposed on the reducibility of one way to the other (of the way up to the way down, but also of stillness to movement, of the lift to the stairs, and vice versa) is the ultimate identity between positive and negative spiritual experience. The asceticism of renunciation, of a purification of the soul through a series of denials, corresponds to the sudden movement of illumination and abandonment to the divine grace. The movement of self-denial that 'Burnt Norton, III' evokes, and that is present in some form in the spiritual voyages of all the third sections of the poems, is taken again explicitly in the paraphrasing of St John of the Cross that 'East Coker' includes. Yet 'Burnt Norton' has told us before that this negative path is essentially the same as its opposite, that asceticism equals a kind of erotic abandonment, and that the denial of selfhood and experience is one with divine grace; emptiness, whether encountered (as the discouraging emptiness of the tube station) or sought for (as in the disciplined denials of 'East Coker') is the other side of fulfilment:

> Christianity has always found room in itself for both types of spiritual experience: that which finds all nature a theophany, and that which feels the truth of Pascal's favourite text: 'Vere tu es Deus absconditus'. This deliberate descent into darkness out of twilight is 'one way'. It is

> the same, the poet tells us, as the other: the undeliberate ascent into the world of light [...].[60]

The reconciliation of these fundamental opposites takes place against the background of Heraclitus' thought, as a thought that tries to account for the elusiveness of experience through participation in the very movement that generates such an elusiveness. The dynamicity of a flow of reality pervades the thought of Heraclitus as a result of its resistance to enter the illusory realm of ordered structure.

Faithfulness to reality conceived in dynamic terms is one of the imperatives in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Hence the sustained praise of music throughout his exposition, since music is undeniably the art most closely involved with the dynamic, most truly Dionysiac. Other art forms acquire their value in relation to their proximity to music, and tragedy in particular is the expression of a perfect balance, in its dramatic opposition of heroic narratives to musical choruses. However, Nietzsche's understanding of the Dionysiac nature of music does not include all the elements that we would expect: the frenzy and rapture that we tend to associate with music that we would call 'Dionysiac', as an effect of the intense and hypnotising power of pervasive and repetitive rhythms, is not emphasised by him. Rather, for Nietzsche these effects arise from musical qualities that are more difficult to reproduce in other arts, such as melody. Therefore, the emphasis is on that which is not reducible to any

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[60] Helen Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, (London: Cresset Press, 1940; repr. 1968), p. 162.

structure: on melody rather than rhythm or harmony. This is perfectly consistent with a firm division between music and the visual arts, that Nietzsche wants to endorse, for the notions of harmony, order, rhythm and beauty are all essentially Apolline features which music resists; paraphrasing Wagner, Nietzsche says that 'music obeys quite different aesthetic principles from the visual arts, and cannot be measured according to the category of beauty'.[61]

Nevertheless, just as Wagnerian music (the main object of praise in *The Birth of Tragedy*) relies heavily on its association with visual display and narrative, the very core of music composition involves commitment to order, repetition and structure, even if only to render them illusory, when subjected to the contingency imposed on them by the dynamicity of the performance. Melody itself presupposes a series of relationships between its components that are often accounted for in the form of recognisable structures of contrast, repetition, reduplication and inversion. Yet what in all instances remains constant is the subordination of all compositional devices to an overall effect that is only perceivable in the temporality of the performance and that cannot be reduced to any fixed structure. To this element, that is most visible in the 'inspirational' character of melody (for which compositional rules are few), Nietzsche appeals in his praise of music and his declared admiration for Wagnerian music in particular.

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[61] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 76.

This is why the musical examples offered in *The Birth of Tragedy* do not always accommodate to our modern concept of musical rapture, largely associated with rhythmic effects rather than with the irreducibility of music to fixed patterns. This is also why the notion of the Dionysiac gains some complexity, in its being continuous with an experience of selflessness that resists being encapsulated in a particular, recognisable mindless act. Thus attending to Nietzsche's notion of the Dionysiac, we can perceive an essential kinship between Palestrina's motets and Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, the latter offering the same fundamental musical experience as the former, by using an intensification of what in the former is lacking: the insistent superposition of sharply defined rhythmic structures. In both cases we attain a similar enrapturing experience, in the first through a music that escapes the fixity of a clearly defined rhythmic pattern, in the second through a music that over-states the recognisability of rhythmic patterns up to the point of their dissolution in superposition and interplay. Our notions of Dionysiac music, and musical examples that are closer to us, only confirm an essential continuity to which Nietzsche's examples already open, in their presupposing an altogether different aesthetic component in the temporality of musical art. Nietzsche's own words already suggest the link between the sacred music of the past and the profane rites, celebrating nature's awakening, which inspired Stravinsky's composition:

> the Lutheran chorale is as profound, courageous and soulful, as exuberantly good and delicate, as the first luring Dionysiac call that rings out from the undergrowth at the approach of spring.[62]

What *The Birth of Tragedy* clearly dismisses is the surrender of music to a structure other than its own all-dissolving dynamicity: music at the service of a descriptive or narrative structure of events, or music at the service of the expression of individual emotion. Narrative and portrayal of individual emotion are found in the operatic recitative, which is, together with the *stilo rappresentativo* that it engenders, one of the aims of Nietzsche's attacks:

> the recitative might be defined as a mixture of epic and lyrical declamation; not a profoundly stable mixture, which could not be achieved from such thoroughly diverse components, but a highly external, mosaic-like configuration [...].[63]

The selflessness inherent in music, as well as its essential dynamicity, cannot be reconciled with a sequential order of events or a personal unity of emotion. Even more clearly than for Schopenhauer, for Nietzsche the willing that music directly represents is not that of the individual, but of the universal will, the universal state of flux and becoming in relation to which individuation is rendered illusory. Therefore the operatic style that he attacks is presented as a

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[62] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 110.

[63] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 90.

necessary aesthetic failure in which music's dependence on the text already speaks the unworthiness of the final product:

> because he [the man who is incapable of art] has no notion of the Dionysiac depths of music, he transforms musical enjoyment into a rationalistic words-and-music rhetoric of passion in the *stilo rappresentativo* [...]. Opera is based on a fallacious belief concerning the artistic process, the idyllic belief that anyone capable of emotions is an artist.[64]

Music degraded to servitude to a text that does not go beyond the boundaries of individuality necessarily betrays its own essence, which is for Nietzsche the unmediated mirroring of an impersonal flux of becoming.

By contrast, music involved in a text that explicitly surpasses the boundaries of individual experience through lyrical impersonality could well have received the approval of the aesthetic judgements in *The Birth of Tragedy*; we have in mind not the drama of Wagner's operas, nor the Dionysiac quality of Greek tragedy, but the musical character of Modernist poetry, and of *Four Quartets* in particular. In *Four Quartets*, the structure of a sequential accumulation of images leaves way to the musical structure that the poetic word requires. *Four Quartets* revolves around the musical essence of poetry, in a movement of whose importance T. S. Eliot is also aware:

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[64] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 92.

> I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image; and I do not believe that this is an experience peculiar to myself.[65]

Certainly this is not an experience peculiar to a particular poet, but one that points to the pervasion of the musical character right down to the core of poetic expression. Of Schiller Nietzsche tells us that

> in the state prior to the act of writing, he does not claim to have had before or within him an ordered causality of ideas, but rather a *musical mood*.[66]

Drawing on this indebtedness of poetry to its musical origin, *Four Quartets* openly declares its borrowing from the form of musical composition in the very title of the series of poems. The recurrent structure that the title suggests (four pieces, each of them for four instruments) announces a structure in which symmetries, re-elaborations and repetitions are going to follow the fluid pattern of a musical composition.

In fact the arrangement of all four poems closely follows an analogy with the divisions of a musical quartet in the several movements of the sonata form.

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[65] T. S. Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry', in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957: repr. 1969), p. 38.

[66] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 29.

If we take the third movement of each of the *Quartets* as a central transitional moment, then the correspondence with the fourfold division of the classic sonata form is almost perfect, adding a further recurrence of the structure in four parts. Helen Gardner supports the view of the third movement as a transition:

> at the close of these centre movements [...] the ear is prepared for the lyric fourth movement. The repetitive circling passage in *East Coker*, in particular, where we seem to be standing still, waiting for something to happen, for a rhythm to break out, reminds one of the bridge passages and leading passages between two movements which Beethoven loved.[67]

The lyric that follows would then correspond to the *scherzo* or *scherzo*-like movement, essentially different in character from the other movements in the sonata form (as it is here), and in turn an addition to the originally contrasting series of three movements in a sequence of fast-slow-fast. Following Gardner's analysis, we can see that the correspondences are quite strict, and do not go beyond the liberty that a musical composition itself is allowed in following the pattern of the sonata. The first movement of each quartet is built on a contrast of subject, as it is rigorously fixed for the sonata, and even for its symphonic descendants. There is a distinction between subject and counter-subject, identified as different thematic materials, and introduced one after the other to be restated again: speculation and the experience in the garden; the cycles of

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[67] Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, p. 41.

change and the silent point of the recurrent beginning; the time of the river and the time of the sea; strangeness and recognition. On these themes the first movement of 'Burnt Norton', 'East Coker', 'The Dry Salvages' and 'Little Gidding' are respectively built, always keeping a contrast that is restated or re-elaborated towards the end of the movement. The second movement is based on the musical technique of variation, in which the subject remains the same, and it is the formal treatment that changes. After the transition of the third movement we arrive at the brief lyric, which is always felt as a radical change of tone and form, before we conclude with the final movement. Here the wider scope, characteristic of the first movements, is taken up again in order to bring the different threads of meaning to a close, with a formal complexity that is again a parallel to the concluding movements of the sonata form, which also aim at counterbalancing the expectations created by the opening movement.

In a less fixed manner, the use of images also involves a treatment that is musical in nature:

> one is constantly reminded of music by the treatment of images, which recur with constant modifications, form their context, or from their combination with other recurrent images, as a phrase recurs with modifications in music.[68]

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[68] Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, p. 48.

The constant modifications to which the images are subjected contribute to create a dynamic experience of meaning in the reader, for whom the connotations of the words are never stable but always highly allusive:

> this musical treatment of the image, the phrase and the word, to bring out latent meanings and different significances, should prevent any reader from trying to fix the symbols in *Four Quartets*.[69]

Thus the meaning itself arises from the music, from the fluid system of relationships that results after the words have been put in motion. Formal qualities and reliance on interaction of meanings are not an added component to the solidity of a preconceived structure, but the very structure from which the significance of the poems arises.

Therefore meaning becomes a function of a dynamic systems of relationships, rather than an independent element to be elicited from its expression. In a similar way, musical notes acquire their value only as a result of the relationships that they hold with the other notes in the scale, and the same sound can appear to us to be totally different if we hear it as part of another hierarchy (of another musical key). The relational value of musical notes allows us, then, to understand the appropriateness of the analogy on which *Four Quartets* rests:

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[69] Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, p. 54.

the word itself, like the note in music, has meaning only in relation to other words. It exists in time and in usage; and since contexts and usages change, the life of a word is a continual death. Yet within a pattern, in a poem, the word's life is preserved almost miraculously by art [...].[70]

The perpetual death of an entity that can only be said to be in its relation to other entities echoes the perpetual mutability of the Heraclitean world, but also the paradoxes associated with Nietzsche's attempt to conceive of a purely relational reality, totally devoid of essences. In any case, it does justice to the fundamentally non-referential nature of music, and it makes us wonder whether the musical qualities of our verbal language do not themselves render more accurately than its referential qualities the dynamicity that both for Heraclitus and Nietzsche was to be identified with ultimate reality.

The self-reflexivity and relationality proper to music take us beyond the representational illusoriness of verbal language:

> music is a plainly self-reflective language, as, indeed, it is the most plainly self-reflective of all the arts. [...] It can elaborate massive designs from small items of thematic material, using itself to fabricate itself; it can unfold inexhaustibly from variation to variation. The threshold into the transforming world of music, which hints at the

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[70] Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, p. 7.

> sounds of another world, is therefore the most sudden, mysterious and amazing.[71]

Agreeing with these views, we can say that the form of *Four Quartets* is truly and deliberately musical, and that its self-reflexivity is evidenced by the high degree of complexity and subtlety that is contained in the elaborations of the thematic materials, in themselves lacking complexity:

> the form is inspired by the composer's power to explore and define, by continual departures from, and returns to, very simple thematic material. The 'thematic material' of the poem is not an idea or a myth, but partly certain common symbols. The basic symbols are the four elements, taken as the material of mortal life [...].[72]

The four elements, present in much of pre-Socratic philosophy as part of an understanding of *φυσις*, are used by Eliot as the primary notions around which the poems are built. Air, earth, water and fire correspond in this order to the basic symbol of each of the four poems. This is another fourfold division that can be added to the series of analogical planes that always seem to replicate within one another: four musical pieces, four instruments, four movements. Moreover, apart from the clear assigning of one element to each of the quartets, the question of their relationship, the question of *φυσις* itself, is addressed towards the close of the work, in the second movement of 'Little Gidding'. Here

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[71] Michael Edwards, *Towards a Christian Poetics* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 194.

[72] Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, p. 44.

the four elements are described in their death, recalling images from all the quartets. The water of 'The Dry Salvages' and the fire of 'Little Gidding' are joined in the last stanza of the lyric, just before the colloquy with the 'dead master':

> Water and fire succeed
> The town, the pasture and the weed.
> Water and fire deride
> The sacrifice that we denied.
> Water and fire shall rot
> The marred foundations we forgot
> Of sanctuary and choir.
>
> This is the death of water and fire.[73]

Although the lyric seems to concentrate only on decay and death, a celebratory feeling of inevitability is conveyed, as in the crude passages of 'East Coker, I'. This links the lyric to the text that it paraphrases: one of Heraclitus' fragments, in which the death of one element involves the life of the following in a never ending cycle: 'Fire lives the death of earth, and air lives the death of fire; water lives the death of air; earth that of water'.[74] Once again, the structure of *Four*

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[73] Eliot, 'Little Gidding, II', in *Collected Poems*, p. 216.

[74] Freeman, *Ancilla...*, p.30. Diels's edition reads:

ζῆι πῦρ τὸν γῆς θάνατον καὶ ἀὴρ ζῆι τὸν πυρὸς θάνατον,ὕδωρ ζῆι τὸν ἀέρος θανατον, γῆ τὸν ὕδατος (Diels, *Fragmente...*, p. 168). However, the sources differ considerably from this in regard to the connections between the elements, as Diels's account of variants shows.

Quartets is intermingled with the dynamicity of Heraclitus' thought as much as with the process of musical composition.

In contrast, the narrative structure of *A Portrait of the Artist* is essentially removed from the modes of composition that music and poetry allow. However, the explicit musical references in the novel (apart from the musical qualities that the flow of the prose often bears, as well as the lyrics inserted), significantly appear at moments of intense spiritual revelation. When the prospect of the university opens the possibilities of a new world for Stephen,

> it seemed to him that he heard notes of fitful music leaping upwards a tone and downwards a diminished fourth, upwards a tone and downwards a major third, like triplebranching flames leaping fitfully, flame after flame, out of a midnight wood.[75]

Towards the end of the novel, Stephen scrutinises the sky searching for signs of his final departure. Seeking to interpret the flight of birds, he hears their cries:

> a shrill twofold note. But the notes were long and shrill and whirring, unlike the cry of vermin, falling a third or a fourth and trilled as the flying beaks clove the air.[76]

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[75] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 179.

[76] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 243.

The revelations that accompany the experience of music even involve a state of selflessness, of weakening of the mind's power to control and assert individuality. Stephen receives the revelation of his unfitness for the priestly office in the form of this dissolving music:

> a quartet of young men were striding along with linked arms, swaying their heads and stepping to the agile melody of their leader's concertina. The music passed in an instant, as the first bars of sudden music always did, over the fantastic fabrics of his mind, dissolving them painlessly and noiselessly as a sudden wave dissolves the sandbuilt turrets of children.[77]

The dissolution of the fabrics of the mind by music echoes the destruction of human purposes by nature, in an image whose history points to the inescapable quality of the cycles of change, again in the account of mutability offered by Heraclitus' thought:

> dark Heraclitus compares the force that builds worlds to a child placing stones here and there, and building sandcastles and knocking them down again.[78]

Thus an exploration of the musical references within the narrative structure of *A Portrait of the Artist* brings us back to the acknowledgement of the eternal

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[77] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p.173.

[78] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 115. See also Diels, *Fragmente...*, fr. 124, p. 178.

mutability of the ultimate reality which Heraclitus' mobile thought endorses, and which stands as a threshold to the text of *Four Quartets*. Yet the first of the Heraclitean fragments that Eliot chooses as epigraphs introduces a point of tension: against the dynamic quality of reality, in perpetual state of becoming, the *logos*offers a guiding point and a reliable unity to us: του λογου δ'εοντος ξυνου ζωουσιν οι πολλοι ως ιδιαν εχοντες φρονησιν. [79] Against the inapprehensible mutability of the turning world, the *λογος* is the still point that offers us light. But what the reference to Heraclitus suggests is that this central point is not entirely outside nature, outside the realm of cyclical change: if the epigraph has any force, it is surely to invalidate the view that 'this light at the still point is a reality of a different order from the rest of the lyric: metaphysical, mystical, beyond the order of nature'.[80] In pre-Socratic thinking, *logos* is not outside *physis* it is the ordering principle of *φυσις*, but remaining in continuity with it. The idea of an essential split between the order of nature and the order of the intellect is a modern idea that *Four Quartets* challenges in its appeal to an original experience of the sacredness of reality, not altogether incompatible with Christian views. Our translation of the notion of *λογος* to our own modern understanding will involve a circumscription that with great difficulty will avoid the charge of simplification: whether we render it as 'word', 'law', 'centre' or 'end', we will be missing the essential unity that

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[79] Diels, *Fragmente*..., fr. 2, p. 151. Freeman's translation reads: 'although the Law is universal, the majority lives as if they had understanding peculiar to themselves' (Freeman, *Ancilla*..., pp. 24-5).

[80] Moody, *T. S. Eliot Poet*, p. 193.

λογος presupposes, a unity of mutability and meaning, nature and intellect, dynamic change and ordering principle. Eliot's interpretation of this λογος as the Christian Word would be in accord with a line of thought that incorporates the pre-modern view of the world into Christian theology, appealing to the beginning of the Gospel of St John:

> we are reminded that the Evangelist adopted from Greek philosophy the conception of the Word or Logos, as the origin and root of all things, and that Christians believe that this Word became flesh and was subject to the tension of life in time, which words suffer.[81]

Eliot's recovering of this continuity between the Greek *logos* and the Christian Word accounts for the fact that in *Four Quartets* the experience of the 'still point' arises from the experience of time: the contingency of mutable reality is continuous with the centre of its movement, and the universal pattern springs from the realm of change. The musical character of the poetic word points to this insight into the nature of reality, whereas the flow of the prose in *A Portrait of the Artist* only secondarily renounces its servitude to a narrative pattern.

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[81] Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, p. 63.

6.5. Individuation vs. Baptism and Epiphany

Joyce's privileging of art as a detached realm in *A Portrait of the Artist* epitomises the nature of the modern condition, for which the sacred spirit (to whose original undifferentiated nature Eliot returns) has undergone a historical process of individuation up to the point of becoming confined to the isolated individual: sacredness is now found nowhere else but in the space of incommunicable personal experience. Nevertheless, Stephen's efforts to devote himself to the sacred artistic enterprise find that the very notion of aesthetic creation involves a certain abandonment of his cherished artistic selfhood, and leads him to acknowledge a space of sacredness broader than his own interiority, ultimately reconciling him with the communal and traditional bonds against which he struggles.

First we are revealed the futility of Stephen's struggle to confine his artistic enterprise to the expression of his own inwardness, for Stephen is always puzzled by the enchanted quality of a reality that does not simply stand in opposition to his inner world: the realm of nature reveals itself as a spiritual realm, thus questioning the conscious detachment of the artist's soul:

> [...] the trees in Stephen's Green were fragrant of rain and the rainsodden earth gave forth its mortal odour, a faint incense rising upward through the mould from many hearts. The soul of the gallant

> venal city which his elders had told him of had shrunk with time to a faint mortal odour rising from the earth [...].[82]

Even if the soul of the city is no longer powerful, the earth retains a life of its own, and communicates with Stephen without mediation. The boldness of the young artist is constantly confronted by the meaningfulness of an external world, dissolving the frontiers between personal experience and flow of meaning, and ultimately rendering illusory the independence of the individual self. This constant, though paradoxical, openness of Stephen's individuality adds a further significance to the irony that is conveyed by the episode of his repentance: the extreme and morbid piety that comes over him is not only grotesque in the context of the novel, but also expressive of a predisposition, always present, against the affirmation of individuality:

> the world for all its solid substance and complexity no longer existed for his soul save as a theorem of divine power and love and universality. So entire and unquestionable was his sense of the divine meaning in all nature granted to his soul that he could scarcely understand why it was in any way necessary that he should continue to live.[83]

Even if this pseudo-mystic formulation is intended by Joyce as a parody of Stephen's inexperience, the ideas of the meaningfulness of the external world

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[82] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 199.

[83] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 162.

and the renouncement of individuality are always present in the moments of Stephen's spiritual awakening, in contrast with those moments of reflection and conscious pursuit. Among the childhood recollections of Stephen we find that

> he remembered the summer evening he had been there to be dressed as boatbearer, the evening of the procession to the little altar in the wood. A strange and holy place.[84]

The holiness of nature is going to be experience in later years as well, and is going to constitute the basis of his artistic revelations: reality would go to encounter him charged with the enchanted quality of the imagination, and his will would disappear in a transfigurative fusion. The unsubstantial female image of Stephen's readings exemplifies the way in which reality is going to dissolve the boundaries of his inwardness:

> [...] a premonition which led him on told him that this image would, without any overt act of his, encounter him. [...] They would be alone, surrounded by darkness and silence: and in that moment of supreme tenderness he would be transfigured. He would fade into something impalpable under her eyes and then in a moment, he would be transfigured.[85]

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[84] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 40-1

[85] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 67.

Contrasting with this recurrent movement of abandonment is Stephen's attitude of detachment, entertaining the solitary visions of an artistic soul doomed to remain in isolation. His perception of his sinful longings also applies to his artistic visions:

> he burned to appease the fierce longings of his heart before which everything else was idle and alien. [...] Beside the savage desire within him to realise the enormities which he brooded on nothing was sacred.[86]

The tension between these two attitudes is never fully resolved in the novel. We get the impression that the moments of revelation of the outer world overpower Stephen's painful isolation, but the image of the solitary artist who feels essentially removed from his surroundings and from others persists throughout the novel.

Why this is so, or to what purpose this tension serves, seems difficult to answer. We can say, following the suggestions made by Hugh Kenner, that this contrast adds a dramatic character to *A Portrait of the Artist*, which is to be taken as the episode of a drama rather than a completed story.[87] The dramatic effect seems to be purposefully enhanced by Joyce's suppression of the aesthetic

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[86] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 105.

[87] See Hugh Kenner, 'The *Portrait* in Perspective', in Thomas Connolly (ed.), *Joyce's 'Portrait': Criticisms and Critiques* (New York: Meredith, 1962; r. London: Owen, 1964), pp. 41-44.

theory of epiphanies, that remains in the earlier version of the novel, *Stephen Hero*. Indeed the centrality of the concept of epiphany would have legitimised an interpretative line showing the peripheral character of Stephen's willingness to preserve his isolation. Joyce tells us of the Stephen of *Stephen Hero* that

> by epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments.[88]

The epiphanic moment is the phase that completes the aesthetic theory of Stephen: in these moments objects reveal their essence to us in the final state of aesthetic apprehension:

> [...] when the relation of the parts [of the object] is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognise that it is *that* thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, achieves its epiphany.[89]

But even if this theory is absent in the *Portrait*, the rhythm of the narrative is clearly based on these epiphanic moments. The explicit formulation of the theory is not made available to Stephen in order to create a dramatic tension that

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[88] Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, p. 216.

[89] Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, p. 218.

persists until the very end, but the points of sudden illumination are presented both to Stephen and to the reader as privileged resting places.

It is in these crucial moments that Stephen's awareness of his artistic destiny becomes more intense, and it is significant that these moments are best characterised precisely by a resort to concepts that recall sacred rites or else a sacred communion with reality at large: they are the epiphanies that reveal the aesthetic core of reality to Stephen, but together with them is also his own baptism as an artist, in the form of a refusal of unity that is only the prelude to his surrender before the outer world:

> Stephen's baptism as artist takes the form of a refusal to enter the water. Always different from his fellows, Stephen becomes reconciled to his otherness when he stands aloof from his schoolmates swimming in the mouth of the Liffey [...].[90]

Shortly after this ritual resistance, Stephen being still by the river, Joyce allows him to foresee his mission through a sustained epiphany in which reality speaks directly to him:

> in Joyce's description of Stephen's moment of transcendent dedication, images of flight and immersion, the eternal and the mortal, art and life,

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[90] Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*, p. 281.

> are fused into a unity. Accepting the totality, Stephen finds his mission as the life-creating artist.[91]

Therefore, Stephen's acceptance of unity, of a sacred primordial space without difference, comes at the time when his artistic consciousness proves most acute, and through experiences that are best qualified by the religious concepts of baptism and epiphany. His own individual spirit is not distinguishable from his body under the influence of this profound insight:

> his soul was soaring in an air beyond the world and the body he knew was purified in a breath and delivered of incertitude and made radiant and commingled with the element of the spirit. An ecstasy of flight made radiant his eyes and wild his breath and tremulous and wild and radiant his windswept limbs.[92]

The religious images are at the service of an artistic celebration of mortality and contingency:

> a wild angel had appeared to him, the angel of mortal youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him in an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory.[93]

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[91] Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*, p. 282.

[92] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 183.

[93] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 186.

The sensuous reality that Stephen had found among the ritual of the sacraments and the depth of his childhood experience unfolds now with the fascinating quality of eternal mutability:

> glimmering and trembling, trembling and unfolding, a breaking light, an opening flower, it spread in endless succession to itself, breaking in full crimson and unfolding and fading to palest rose, leaf by leaf and wave of light by wave of light, flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes, every flush deeper than the other.[94]

It is precisely in this epiphanic moment of intensified awareness that Stephen introduces elements that transcend his general attitude throughout the novel. Such elements have found an echo in other episodes and references, and testify to Stephen's own divining of the need to enlarge his narrow views in order to embrace an aesthetic attitude in all its width: the need, in other words, to transcend the sacredness of selfhood and identity in order to be open to the significant speech of significant reality, ultimately including the mythical speech of community, tradition and religion.

In the epiphanic moments of *A Portrait of the Artist*, of which the clearest is this series of visions of Stephen by the river, Joyce tackles the question of the mythopoeic nature of literature, by resorting to the notion of a spontaneous opening of reality. Similar moments can be found in *Dubliners*, in which the revelatory experience constitutes the climax of each of the stories.

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[94] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 187.

The state of awareness involved produces a change both in the perception of reality and in the nature of reality:

> Joyce at this time can speak of writing and literary method in terms of analogies with sacramental language. Images, words and characters are to be transformed into meaning and truth. His language suggests that the writer brings to light what is true in an expressive way, but also that by doing so, change can occur.[95]

Therefore, in this context, the criteria of literary creation and perception are continuous with the criteria for the elucidation of reality. The sudden moment of awareness is not reflective, but continuous with the reality that is being manifested: there is no clear distinction between the process of constitution of the myth and the unfolding of the events upon which this myth is based.

The experience of the reading is, then, in itself an epiphany, not just a recalling or a reference:

> the incidents take place in situations that enable the reader to enter into an understanding of the experience so that the revelation takes place with something of the force with which it engages the characters.[96]

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[95] Brian Russell, 'James Joyce: Prospects for Epiphany', *Theology*, 96 (796), Jan/Feb 1993, p. 37.

[96] Russell, 'Prospects for Epiphany', p. 36.

The epiphanic moments are re-enacted for the reader, for their linguistic quality identifies them with the very experience that characters undergo:

> language can be a sacrament in an instrumental sense — by creating awareness that causes change in the characters and in the reader,[97]

in the same manner as the re-enactment of a rite does not only recall a past experience but also allows us to re-live that experience.

However, despite his reliance on an epiphanic notion of reality, even to an extent in his later works, Joyce's position is essentially different from Eliot's in that the meaningfulness of external reality has to be associated either with dismemberment (in *Ulysses*) or dramatic tension (in the *Portrait*). While Eliot finds support in a stable vision of external sacredness by his commitment to Anglo-Catholicism,

> Joyce does not believe he is inhabiting a secure metaphysical order of objective divine reality. He is eclectic in his framework for reality and certainly ambiguous or paradoxical in his relation to Roman Catholicism.[98]

For this reason the aestheticist individualism of Stephen cannot be fully redeemed within the novel, not even after a series of epiphanic manifestations,

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[97] Russell, 'Prospects for Epiphany', p. 37.

[98] Russell, 'Prospects for Epiphany', p. 39.

and constantly creates a dramatic tension that is to be resolved by other stories: those of Icarus' fall or St Stephen's martyrdom; two sacrificial figures that reproduce once more the denial of selfhood that Nietzsche found on the Greek tragic stage and that he regarded as the necessary condition of aesthetic excellence.

7. Two Arrivals at the Aesthetic as the End of a Structured Spiritual Voyage

The impossibility of the experiencing of sacredness through contact with the outer world, perceived as the loss of meaning of a crucial dimension of reality, is thematised in different ways by Modernist writers, but it occupies in most cases the same central role in the configuration of the ideological background of their literary works. Whether in parallel with the social impact of twentieth-century industrialisation, the moral preoccupations arising from the World War, or just the awareness of an accentuation in the conditions of Modernity, Modernism displays through literature the absence of ultimate meaning in the contemporary Western world as a spiritual crisis (the same crisis that Nietzsche diagnoses as resulting from the long Socratic disease of the West). Modernism then opts for recreating a past meaningfulness, or a meaningfulness other than Western, or for simply presenting the spectacle of barrenness in a literary form, or even, it tries to extract meaning precisely out of the lack of meaning of modern times. James Joyce and T. S. Eliot privilege some of these approaches over others in each of their works.

Each in its own way, *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* depict a world where naivity is no longer possible, but where the archaeological nostalgia for meaning is itself a meaningful movement in the middle of an apparently barren landscape. In contrast, *A Portrait of the Artist* and *Four Quartets* present a structure analogous to the very meaning-bestowing structure that Modernity

seemed to be unable to re-enact other than in nostalgia, archaeology or anthropological research. The structure and structures (patterns, recurrent symbolism, plot) of *A Portrait of the Artist* and *Four Quartets* restore the possibility of external sacredness by being, at several levels, a discursive rendering of the ritual: a spiritual quest that is also a mythic voyage.

7.1. The Re-enchantment of a Desacralised World: Sacredness of Nature and the Everyday

Stephen confesses to the dean of studies in chapter V of *A Portrait of the Artist*: 'I am sure I could not light a fire'.[1] Yet what he takes his mission to be is precisely the rekindling of the modern world through art: Stephen's judgement on the emptiness and lack of sanctity of the representative of the religious order responsible for his education, is also a judgement on the Modern condition, for which the temples are empty and the rituals meaningless:

> kneeling thus on the flagstone to kindle the fire and busied with the disposition of his wisps of paper and candlebutts he [the dean] seemed more than ever a humble server making ready the place of sacrifice in an empty temple [...].[2]

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[1] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 200.

[2] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 200.

Stephen's assumption of his role as a 'priest of the eternal imagination' has come after a series of stages, such as this realisation of surrounding emptiness which finally prompt him to take action to restore the world to its lost sacredness. In his childhood he could still inhabit a world that could enter a dialogue with the intensity of his experience:

> a faint sickness of awe made him feel weak. How could they have done that? He thought of the dark silent sacristy. There were dark wooden presses there where the crimped surplices lay quietly folded. It was not the chapel but still you had to speak under your breath. It was a holy place. He remembered the summer evening he had been there to be dressed as boatbearer, the evening of the procession to the little altar in the wood.[3]

The profanation of the sacristy, which Stephen's classmates are thought to have carried out, has a profound impact on him, and is immediately associated with the experience of the surrounding world as sacred: the wood was, as the sacristy, also a holy place. How could this relationship be broken? How could his fellow pupils have breached the ultimate respect for the world? Their act is a sacrilege, and is qualified as such in the midst of plastic references to the Pagan sensuousness of Catholic ritual:

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[3] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 40-41.

that must have been a terrible sin. to go in there quietly at night, to open the dark press and steal the flashing gold thing into which God was put on the altar in the middle of flowers and candles at benediction while the incense went up in clouds at both sides as the fellow swung the censer and Dominic Kelly sang the first part by himself in the choir.[4]

Yet this is still a sacrilege, a transgression which doesn't alter the sacredness of the law — which belongs to a larger structure of meaningfulness that on the whole is not threatened. As the narrative progresses, Stephen finds it more difficult to believe in this world of external sacredness: all of chapter II constitutes Stephen's realisation of the emptiness of what he is supposed to inherit as a legacy: respect for his country, for his family history, for his church. Signalling a contrast with the enchanted world of childhood, in chapter II we find not a sacrilege, but a *desecration* of a holy place. In the moments of preparation for the school play in which he is to take part, Stephen

> thought he saw a likeness between his father's mind and that of this smiling well-dressed priest: and he was aware of some desecration of the priest's office or the vestry itself, whose silence was now routed by loud talk and joking and its air pungent with the smells of the gasjets and the grease.[5]

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[4] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 47.

[5] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 89.

Sacred silence and sacred smell are now replaced by a disrespectful mundanity. Also, there is an essential similitude between his father's mind and that of the priest, as if both wanted to participate in the same spreading of emptiness over his life. Stephen will feel, later in this chapter, that a distinct abyss opens between him and his father: the trip to Cork shows with sadness how Stephen cannot possibly take over a legacy of dead symbols. When with his father and his father's friends,

> an abyss of fortune or of temperament sundered him from them. His mind seemed older than theirs: it shone coldly on their strifes and happiness and regrets like a moon upon a younger earth.[6]

Thus Stephen does not seem to have lost an unexplored future, but a well-known past: his mind is older, and indeed he already recalls his childhood as an experience of outer meaningfulness. What is more, his childhood is the world's own childhood, an earth which was once young, naive and transparent as he was, and which he can now only look coldly upon.

Stephen's country, 'the old sow that eats her farrow'[7], cannot offer him what he seeks either. Through his encounters with Davin, Stephen distances himself from his national past too. It saddens him that there is no life in his country any longer (in the same way that he feels a paternal, reciprocated, affection for Davin), but he is not willing to assume responsibility for this

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[6] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 101-102.

[7] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 220, and *Ulysses*, p. 552.

death. In *Ulysses*, where the emptiness of national symbols is part of the meaningful attempt to play with vacuities, we read:

> STEPHEN [...]. You die for your country, suppose. (He places his arm on Private Carr's sleeve.) Not that I wish it for you. But I say: Let my country die for me. Up to the present it has done so. I don't want it to die. Damn death. Long live life![8]

And after the death of meanings displayed through chapter II, where even the punishment episode is 'desacralised' and made fun of,[9] Stephen's re-enchanting mission begins to take shape, and shifts progressively from the bounds of religion (chapter III) to the artistic priesthood. If the world seems to recover his past splendour in the form of 'a theorem of divine power',[10] it is only after the epiphanies of chapter IV that Stephen will be ready again for the call of a significant world. In his visions by the river, it is before a worldly *image* that he reaches a holy ecstasy: 'her image had passed into his soul for ever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy'[11];

and as a result of the revelation of a future artistic mission in a profane world, nature itself re-awakens and embraces him:

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[8] Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 549.

[9] See Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 76.

[10] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 162.

[11] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 186.

> he felt above him the vast indifferent dome and the calm processes of the heavenly bodies; and the earth beneath him, the earth that had borne him, had taken him to her breast.[12]

The structure of *Four Quartets*, on the contrary, may seem to run against a view of a natural world inhabited by sacredness. This is C. K. Stead's view:

> the poet's feeling takes form in experiencing the visible world, where it is content to rest; only the imposed plan, not the feeling, insist that such experience is unsatisfying, and presses towards abstraction.[13]

This line of argument maintains that the affirmation of a meaningful experience of this world is made in *Four Quartets* in spite of the imposed structure, not thanks to it. If 'it is *in* the world, *in* the love of created things, that poetry is generated and takes life',[14] then the structure that Eliot imposes on his own poetic genius points towards an otherworldly experience, and tries to silence the life-affirming transcendence of the impetus of his poetry.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that such an antagonism, although at work, is resolved within the poems themselves. They are a reflection on the nature of artistic form, pattern and structure, and they also answer the tensions that they enact. Ultimately, it is precisely the notion of artistic form that

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[12] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 187.

[13] C. K. Stead, *The New Poetic* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), p. 180.

[14] Stead, *The New Poetic*, p. 179.

resolves the conflict between transcendence and temporality: each of the quartets stages a tension between the affirmation of the meaningfulness of temporality and the need for a transcendent pattern, and finally resolves this tension resorting to a notion of a sacred nature under the eyes of artistic form. The possibility of this resolution is already prefigured in the first of the two epigraphs:[15] the *logos* is all-pervading, not dissociable: proportion, analogy and reckoning (structure) do not necessarily entail the positing of a transcendent source; rather, we can reconcile transcendence and the affirmation of this world, we can integrate sacredness into this world, through the pattern of art.

The first section of each quartet is already a successful achievement of this integration. In each of them eternity is hinted at in privileged moments of temporal engagement. The garden and the children of 'Burnt Norton', the country imagery and cyclic nature of 'East Coker' (even though with crude overtones), the superhuman power of destruction of sea and river in 'The Dry Salvages', and the moment of atemporality of midwinter spring in 'Little Gidding'; all of them succeed in intertwining a poetic impulse that relies on sensuous imagery with a transcendent meaning. It is true that this achievement is presented only to be undermined by the structured stage which follows: the second sections push the equilibrium of the first up to the point of almost making it break in the formal lyric passages, in order to then introduce a

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[15] του λογου δ'εοντος ξυνου ζωουσιν οι πολλοι ως ιδιαν εχοντες φρονησιν (in Eliot, *Four Quartets*, in *Collected Poems*, p. 189, from Hermann Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 1, (Zürich/Berlin: Weidmannsche, 1952 [rpt 1954]), fr. 2, p. 151).

discursive passage which states the lack of adequacy of a correspondence that has been pressed too far: the attempt to reach the still point is not wholly satisfactory; the pattern understood as knowledge is not valid; illumination is forgotten while agony remembered; and the gifts of old age prove to be empty. However, after the ascesis of section III and the acknowledgement of the need for intercession in section IV, the last section of each of the quartets restates the possibility of a world of grace, precisely on the condition of artistic pattern: form and pattern are the means to reach the still point in 'Burnt Norton'; as it is the precision of pattern in 'East Coker'; musical pattern provides hints of an otherwise saintly occupation in 'The Dry Salvages'; and finally, in 'Little Gidding', the complete consort dancing together re-unites the dispersed elements in the perfection of the work of art.

Therefore, the structure of *Four Quartets*, in a self-reflective gesture, enacts the structural movement which it thematises: it offers itself as an answer to the questioning that it itself constitutes. We must not forget that the negative tone of sections II and III is transitional, and a necessary stage of a journey that starts off with a relatively unproblematic presentation of sacred nature, and which points to the need of a restatement of this sacredness (together with individual spiritual health) in terms of artistic form, finding at last a self-grounding exposition in section V of 'Little Gidding'.

The emphasis on negativity, disenchantment, ascesis and otherworldly experience comes as a stage that follows a not wholly satisfactory understanding

of immanence (we could say, the understanding that Modernity no longer believes in), and comes also as a stage that precedes the final exposition of this understanding in terms of art. There is then an articulation between what C. K. Stead regards as the more clearly achieved 'poetic passages' and the discursive ones, in which he thinks that 'if the feeling of failure is truly there, it is there unused; it has not been transmuted by imagination into something larger than itself'.[16] The failure and the departure from 'anything that refuses to be anything but poetry'[17] are there in order to affirm the need for an art that can no longer be naive, and yet must exist; for a terrestrial sacredness that can no longer be natural, and yet must exist, even if it stands in need of intercession. The first sections by themselves wouldn't have acknowledged the modern, secularised condition of our world, and the final sections by themselves would not have acknowledged that the Modernist re-enchantment of the world through art does not simply follow from the lost charm of a primordial age, but implies a series of negative stages.

The way in which Eliot finds a successful formulation for the affirmation of the sacredness of nature isn't anywhere clearer than in the structure of *Four Quartets*, which the identification of 'the fire and the rose' closes. At opposite extremes, while in *The Waste Land* the poetry refuses to be anything else but poetry, therefore remaining a myth that takes itself as such,

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[16] Stead, *The New Poetic*, p. 178.

[17] Stead, *The New Poetic*, p. 176.

Murder in the Cathedral presents us a midwinter spring that seems to want to lead us to the same resting place as that of 'Little Gidding':

> Spring has come in winter. Snow in the branches
>
> Shall float as sweet as blossoms. Ice along the ditches
>
> Mirror the sunlight. Love in the orchard
>
> Send the sap shooting. Mirth matches melancholy.[18]

But to the words of the tempter, Thomas can only answer:

> Leave — well alone —, the springtime fancy.[19]

Equally, the chorus acknowledges that

> Even in us the voice of seasons, the snuffle of winter, the song of spring, the drone of summer, the voices of beasts and birds, praise Thee,[20]

but they are also aware

> That the sin of the world is upon our heads.[21]

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[18] T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, in *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London & Boston: Faber & Faber, 1969 [rpt 1978]), p. 247.

[19] Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, ibid., p. 248.

[20] Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, ibid., p. 281.

[21] Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, ibid., p. 282.

Even the 'spiritual flesh of nature'[22] that so much seems to pervade the play, is understood in negative terms: there is 'death in the rose, death in the hollyhock, sweet pea, hyacinth, primrose and cowslip'.[23]

By contrast, integrated in the structure of *Four Quartets*, even the everyday is liable to be charged with sacredness. If in *Murder in the Cathedral* the holy ground is menaced by sightseers armed with guide-books,[24] the lift of Gloucester Road Tube Station that is referred to in 'Burnt Norton' III can carry all the allusions to a central question in the poems, encapsulated in the second of Heraclitus' epigraphs: the equal validity of ascending and descending spiritual movements. And it is not only a fanciful random sign, but the provider of a meaningful private experience for Eliot, since in that lift, like Julia in *The Cocktail Party*, he could engage in meditation:

JULIA: No, you stop and talk to Edward. I'm not helpless yet
And besides, I like to manage the machine myself—
In a lift I can meditate.[25]

Likewise, in the context of *Four Quartets* the significance of characters like the Agatha of *The Family Reunion* appears in full clarity: otherwise her appeal to the meaningfulness of natural signs might appear misplaced or anachronistic:

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[22] Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, ibid., p. 271.

[23] Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, ibid., p. 270.

[24] See Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, ibid., p. 282.

[25] T. S. Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*, ibid., p. 366.

Men tighten the knot of confusion

Into perfect misunderstanding,

Reflecting a pocket-torch of observation

Upon each other's opacity

Neglecting all the admonitions

From the world around the corner

The wind's talk in the dry holly tree

The inclination of the moon

The attraction of the dark passage

The paw under the door.[26]

And against the 'world without God'[27] to which *The Waste Land* is a first answer, and Colby's secret garden without divine grace in *The Confidential Clerk*,[28] the rose-garden of *Four Quartets* acquires an enchanted quality that endures the whole spiritual voyage and still has children in its trees by the time 'Little Gidding' ends.

The artistic pattern of *Four Quartets* seems to be the realisation of Sir Claude's desire, when in *The Confidential Clerk* he states:

I want a world where the form is the reality

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[26] T. S. Eliot, *The Family Reunion*, ibid., p. 290.

[27] See Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, ibid., p. 280.

[28] See Eliot, *The Confidential Clerk*, ibid., pp. 473-474.

> Of which the substantial is only a shadow.[29]

Thus the self-legitimising structure of *Four Quartets* provides for Eliot the pattern that allows for the enchantment of the external world to take place.

7.2. A Ritual Structure of Sacrificial Selflessness

Against a desacralised world, where rites do not take place any longer, the structure of *A Portrait of the Artist* offers the pattern of a young man's initiation rite. Stephen is aware of his sacred destiny, and first looks at the Catholic church (presented to him as endowed not only with God's grace, but also 'with sacraments and sacrifice'[30]), realising that 'it was partly the absence of an appointed rite which had always constrained him to inaction'.[31] Nevertheless, the appointed rites of the Catholic church will provide him with an only temporary comfort. Soon Stephen begins to find that the selflessness he seeks does not come to him through religious rites, and even the Eucharist begins to lose its sacrificial meaning:

> his actual reception of the eucharist did not bring him the same dissolving moments of virginal self-surrender as did those spiritual

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[29] Eliot, *The Confidential Clerk*, ibid., p. 464.

[30] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 128.

[31] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 172.

communions made by him sometimes at the close of some visit to the Blessed Sacrament.[32]

What then is the role of the Eucharist in *A Portrait of the Artist*; what kind of communion does it offer, if its meaningfulness already seems to fade at the beginning of chapter IV? The pervasiveness of references to the Eucharist suggests that this is not just a ritual structure to be replaced or to be overcome: the pattern of communion through sacrifice must then continue throughout the rest of *A Portrait of the Artist*. In what form then? Following Karl Beckson's remarks,[33] we can say that it continues in the form of an inverted Eucharist. An inverted chalice-shaped *carmen figuratum* prefigures, at the beginning of the novel[34], Stephen's rejection of communion towards the end of it. But contrariwise to what happens in *Dubliners* with the manipulation of Eucharistic

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[32] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 164

[33] See Karl Beckson, 'Stephen Dedalus and the Emblematic Cosmos', in *James Joyce Quarterly* 6 (Fall 1968), pp. 85-96.

[34] In Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 12, we read:

Stephen Dedalus

Class of Elements

Clongowes Wood College

Sallins

Country Kildare

Ireland

Europe

The World

The Universe

symbols, Stephen's inverted chalice in *A Portrait of the Artist* is a conveyor of grace: it is precisely in his voyage from religion to art, in his turning of the chalice upside down, that Stephen's world acquires meaning. Before this novel, the chalice had provided no spiritual fulfilment: in 'The Sisters' we are from the beginning prepared to attend 'something uncanny',[35] and the chalice that the priest breaks there turns into the chalice empty of meaning in his deathbed:

> the old priest was lying still in his coffin as we had seen him, solemn and truculent in death, an idle chalice on his breast.[36]

Moreover, the mock eucharist that the protagonist is offered (the sherry that he tastes and the cream-crackers that he rejects) do not provide a meaningful substitute for the idle chalice. Similarly, the chalice that the protagonist of 'Araby' bears leads only to disappointment and lack of achievement, even though at first he states: 'I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes'.[37] In contrast, the Eucharistic symbols of *A Portrait of the Artist* seem to be successfully twisted to the advantage of the affirmation of Stephen's artistic priesthood, and then the selflessness of ritual sacrifice seems to be achieved in the realm of art. At the narrative level, this degree of artistic selflessness is already implied in the shifts of personality of the narrative voice: Stephen's interior monologues spring comfortably from a third-person voice that often ~~inadvertedly~~ switches to free indirect speech, so that the voices of

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[35] James Joyce, *Dubliners* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1926 [rpt 1996]), p. 7.

[36] Joyce, *Dubliners*, p. 17.

[37] Joyce, *Dubliners*, p. 31.

personality and impersonality constantly cross their own boundaries, bringing for the modern self the indeterminacy of the literary voices of *Turpin Hero*.[38] And yet, the imagery that surrounds artistic self-enclosure doesn't appear to be liberating, but restrictive, or at least ambiguous. The 'tower of ivory'[39] that is both female beauty and the reclusion of the artist, is misunderstood by the Protestants according to Stephen, but is this not the case precisely because they fail to associate this image with an interceding power, with the interceding figure of Mary?

If that holds, then the ritual structure of *A Portrait of the Artist* is not exhausted in a move from religion to art, but requires, as *Four Quartets* require the intercession of sections IV, that art go beyond itself towards something greater, and the artist die a death that is more than only artistic. Stephen wants first to die for the music of the words of his last cry,[40] and later recalls this in relation to another death: he had

> dreamed of being dead, of mass being said for him by the rector in a black and gold cope, of being buried then in the little graveyard of the community off the main avenue of limes. But he had not died then. Parnell had died. There had been no mass for the dead in the chapel

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[38] See Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 233.

[39] See Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 35, 43.

[40] See Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 22.

> and no procession. He had not died but he had faded out like a film in the sun.[41]

Parnell's non-mourned death is also Icarus', a silent coming out of existence by the destructive power of the sun. Stephen foresees once more his own death, not as a child's death for the musicality of the words, but as the silent price to be paid by artistic boldness. And if his surname joins him to a form of death, his name joins it to another: to the sacrificial death of St Stephen, inaugurating the series of the Christian martyrs.

All this points to a death that is more than the impersonality of art, and that at the same time is indissolubly mingled with it. Stephen's death is, at least, a ritual death, a stage in the process of fundamental change. Doreen M. E. Gillam has brought to the surface the close correspondence between chapter IV of *A Portrait of the Artist* and the stages of the ritual of youth initiation in Greek religion, in particular as described in a work by Jane Harrison to which Joyce could have had access.[42] Rather than textual correspondences, it is interesting to note that the progression of stages that closes chapter IV and that mirrors the structure of an ancient rite of initiation, necessarily includes the idea of ritual death, both real (the sacrifice of the bull which Stephen becomes) and symbolic (the detachment from the female sphere of mother and church). At the end of the chapter we are in fact

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[41] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 98-99.

[42] See Doreen M. E. Gillam, 'Stephen Kouros', in *James Joyce Quarterly 8* (Spring 1971), pp. 221-232.

in a 'midnight wood' where music and flame, intoxicants of hunter and hunted alike in the *Bacchae*, symbolise that 'wayward instinct' that seduces Stephen from the path of ordination, leading him instead to initiation into the service of Dionysos.[43]

Yet the ambiguity of Stephen's own name is present even in this movement of initiation, as the initiation into the mysteries of art plays with Stephen himself as the sacrificial victim: 'an ecstasy of flight made radiant his eyes',[44] but as well as a flyer he is the 'stephaneforos', the bull bearing the sacrificial garland. Thus Stephen's sacrifice is constantly signalled, but never takes place within the text: if it had, Stephen would have become the mature artist who doesn't appear in *A Portrait of the Artist*. According to Stephen's own restricted views, and against a text which clearly surpasses him, Stephen fails to die the sacrificial death that would have redeemed the text which gave birth to him: instead, he dies the aestheticist death of Icarus, and he dies it without the text, in order to preserve the artistic integrity of which Joyce is nearer than Stephen. Stephen in *A Portrait of the Artist* has even ceased to be a heroic figure as he could have been in *Stephen Hero*, for the death of a hero, even if placed outside the text, would have had the same sacrificial value that it had on the ancient Greek stage according to Nietzsche's views, to which value the artistic stature of Stephen does not here stand.

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[43] Gillam, 'Stephen Kouros', p. 224.

[44] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 183.

The voice of the artistic self is much closer to the voice of the text in *Four Quartets*, even though claims are made that artistic impersonality in *Four Quartets* is achieved *in spite of* a personal voice that takes artistic value away from the poems. Such, as already pointed out, is the view of C. K. Stead in his discussion of the structure of *Four Quartets*. Against the more strictly poetic achievements of Eliot's earlier poetry, including *The Waste Land*, *Four Quartets* is said to suffer from an *imposed* structure that instils too much of the personality of the author:

> *The Waste Land* has a quality that calls forth organic metaphors when we attempt to describe it. It achieves 'impersonality' of a kind which *Four Quartets*, with its many discursive passages and its consciously controlled plan, does not attempt. [...] However wise and admirable the man it displays, the poem [*Four Quartets*] remains [...] imperfectly achieved, with large portions of abstraction untransmuted into the living matter of poetry.[45]

However, are not the discursive passages (those which express a 'personal' voice and 'impose' a 'consciously controlled plan')precisely the passages in which the search for impersonality is most obvious? And is this even a 'personal' search for impersonality?

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[45] Stead, *The New Poetic*, pp. 177-178.

Those speculative passages, most notably the discursive passages that follow the formal lyrics in II, and the call for ascesis that section II in each poem constitutes, explicitly state a movement of self-sacrifice and self-negation that transcends the boundaries of the personal. And this impersonality, in view of the sequence of stages that the quartets follow, can only be finally achieved in accordance with an impersonality that is also that of art. Therefore the structure of *Four Quartets*, viewed as a whole and a progression, provides a more elaborate and self-reflective impersonality than that of *The Waste Land*, although equally intertwined with notions of artistic excellence. If section III in each poem dwells in the negative character of personal experience as a form of self-sacrifice, it is only as part of a structured process in which, after the intercession of section IV, they lead to a mystic union hinted at or achieved in terms of art in section V. The negative ascetic movements of St John of the Cross in 'East Coker' III are already explained at the end of 'Burnt Norton' as part of a pattern:

> The detail of the pattern is movement,
> As in the figure of the ten stairs.
> Desire itself is movement
> Not in itself desirable;
> Love is itself unmoving,
> Only the cause and end of movement,
> Timeless, and undesiring
> Except in the aspect of time
> Caught in the form of limitation

Between un-being and being.[46]

Whereas the detail of the pattern is movement (a desire to free itself from desire), *through* this patterned movement the stillness of love is reached.

Sacrifice is thus in *Four Quartets* understood as self-sacrifice: the self which dies or is lost in the ecstasy of love is both the victim and the executioner. What makes this selflessness different from that of mere religious or moral poetry is that within *Four Quartets* ascetic selflessness is to be resolved in the context of art. The death of the self had a strictly religious set-up in *Murder in the Cathedral*, where sacrifice can only be understood in relation to Christ's Passion:

> whenever Mass is said, we re-enact the Passion and Death of Our Lord; and on this Christmas Day we do this in celebration of His Birth. So that at the same moment we rejoice in His coming for the salvation of men, and offer again to God His Body and Blood in sacrifice [...].[47]

Any other sacrificial death, including that of St Stephen, is only understood by reference to Christ's sacrifice:

> not only do we at the feast of Christmas celebrate at once Our Lord's Birth and His Death: but on the next day we celebrate the martyrdom

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[46] Eliot, 'Burnt Norton' V, in *Collected Poems*, p. 195

[47] Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, in *The Complete Poems and Plays*, ed. cit., p. 260.

of His first martyr, the blessed Stephen. Is it an accident. do you think, that the day of the first martyr follows immediately the day of the Birth of Christ? By no means. Just as we rejoice and mourn at once, in the Birth and in the Passion of Our Lord; so also in a smaller figure, we both rejoice and mourn in the death of martyrs.[48]

In *The Confidential Clerk*, sacrifice is set up in the context of a moral dilemma, and understood only in moral terms:

> MRS. GUZZARD. [...] in telling you the truth
>
> I am sacrificing my ambitions for Colby.
>
> I am sacrificing also my previous sacrifice.
>
> This is even greater than the sacrifice I made
>
> When I let you claim him [...].
>
> Don't you understand that this revelation
>
> Drives the knife deeper and twists it in the wound?[49]

Sacrifice within *Four Quartets* cannot be understood as only a religious rite or a moral act: it is also an artistic structure, and it is only by incorporating the realm of art that it can achieve its efficacy. Thus, whereas the different sections of *Four Quartets* offer hints and guesses, partial understanding and paths to follow, the final section of 'Little Gidding' reaches the stillness of a perfected sacrifice, the union of 'the fire and the rose'. Before, the sacrificial fire had been lit by the formal lyric of section IV, which had been preceded, in its turn, by the

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[48] Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, ibid., p. 261.

[49] Eliot, *The Confidential Clerk*, ibid., p. 515.

extreme problematisation of the self that runs through the colloquium with the dead master. He is someone 'known, forgotten, half recalled / Both one and many,[50] a 'familiar compound ghost / Both intimate and unidentifiable' which is the poetic voice itself assuming a double part in its conversation. This ghost is not only the wise stranger, the unidentified cold psychoanalyst of *The Cocktail Party*, who places on others his own phantasmal nature:

> [...] it is perhaps still more difficult
>
> To keep up the pretence that you are not strangers.
>
> The affectionate ghosts: the grandmother,
>
> The lively bachelor uncle at the Christmas party,
>
> The beloved nursemaid—those who enfolded
>
> Your childhood years in comfort, mirth, security—
>
> If they returned, would it not be embarrassing?[51]

The ghost of 'Little Gidding' doesn't come as a tempter either, as did the known and unknown character who offers Thomas the gift of spiritual power:

> TEMPTER. As you do not know me, I do not need a name
>
> And, as you know me, that is why I come.
>
> You know me, but have never seen my face.
>
> To meet before was never time or place.[52]

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[50] Eliot, 'Little Gidding', in *Collected Poems*, p. 217.

[51] Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*, in *The Complete Poems and Plays*, p.385.

[52] Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, ibid., p. 253.

The ghost of 'Little Gidding' is the poetic voice's own double, embarked in a process of liberation from personality that commences in this inner dialogue and finishes in the moment of rest that the artistic impersonality of section V achieves. There the ritual to be performed in that unreal season, midwinter spring, seems to find 'every phrase / And sentence that is right', and accomplish that sacred moment of stillness prefigured in the disturbing sacrificial imagery of *The Family Reunion*:

> Spring is an issue of blood
>
> A season of sacrifice
>
> And the wail of the new full tide
>
> Returning the ghosts of the dead
>
> Those whom the winter drowned
>
> Do not the ghosts of the drowned
>
> Return to land in the spring?
>
> Do the dead want to return?
>
> [...]
>
> I believe the moment of birth
>
> Is when we have knowledge of death
>
> I believe the season of birth
>
> Is the season of sacrifice
>
> For the tree and the beast, and the fish
>
> Thrashing itself upstream:
>
> And what of the terrified spirit
>
> Compelled to be reborn
>
> To rise toward the violent sun
>
> Wet wings into the rain cloud

Harefoot over the moon?'[53]

Now, in 'Little Gidding', the moment which is announced at the end of each of the previous quartets is reached, and 'the moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree / Are of equal duration'.[54] The sacrificial freedom from desire and movement, the emptying from personality, is achieved 'in the stillness / Between two waves of the sea'.[55] But this only makes sense as a point in a journey, as a part of a structure that is all, as a whole, directed towards this still moment of sacrificial selflessness.

7.3. A Mythical Narrative Progression

7.3.1. Mythical modes of narrativity in *A Portrait of the Artist*

A Portrait of the Artist reverses the procedure found in *Turpin Hero*, the folkloric ballad which Stephen recalls, in that it starts as a third person narrative and ends in the first person, with the diary entries of Stephen. This progression may want to indicate the progressive control of Stephen over his own voice as an artist, but above all it is, rather than a clearly defined pattern, a framework in which a fluid exchange of narrative voices is allowed to occur. Ultimately, the

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[53] Eliot, *The Family Reunion*, ibid., p.310.

[54] Eliot, 'Little Gidding', in *Collected Poems*, p.222.

[55] Eliot, 'Little Gidding', ibid., p.222.

fluidity of voices within *A Portrait of the Artist* relies on the interchangeability of the first and the third person, aligning itself with a not-yet-distinct notion of objectivity which is constitutive of a mythic narrative and which the Turpin Hero tales rescue.

Together with the instability of the location of the narrating focus, the multidirectionality of narrative time transports us to a conception of story-telling which finds its clearest expression in mythic stories. Linear progression is challenged, in that, cutting across the chronological sequence of events, there appear recursivity and interdependence of actions: actions are reproduced, recalled, re-described, reinterpreted, in order to throw light upon one another relatively apart from their chronological order of appearance.

An example of the effects created by the shifts of narrative voice can be found in the episode of the marshall ghost that Stephen describes as a child.[56] The paragraph begins with a rendering of Stephen's train of thought in what formally comes closest to free indirect speech:

> The prefect's shoes went away,

placing us in a standpoint that is neither the reporter's position of objectivity ('He heard the noise of the prefect's shoes go away') nor Stephen's interiority speaking for itself ('I hear the noise of the prefect's shoes go away'). The

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[56] See Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 16-17.

objects are detached from the noise they produce, and their going away presented as an objective fact, but it is only in relation to Stephen's perception that this fact can be such at all; therefore the objectivity of 'he heard' and the subjectivity of 'I hear' are both implied and surpassed in this third position, which is further maintained by a series of voice shifts:

> Where? Down the staircase and along the corridors or to his room at the end? He saw the dark. Was it true about the black dog that walked there at night with eyes as big as carriagelamps?[57]

After the direct rendering of Stephen's questions ('Where? Down the staircase [...]?), we are placed again outside Stephen's mind ('He saw the dark'), only in order to recover a position of ambiguity in the fusion of his inner wonder (question mark, interrogative word order) with the objectivity of the reporter (past tense, deictic shifted to 'there').

In this particular passage, the ambiguity of a child-like style contributes to the indeterminacy of the states of inner though, in what is already an exploration of interior monologue techniques. Sentences are short and syntax is simple, conveying the free succession of events without ordering principle which corresponds to the flow of consciousness. References shift: from 'he' referring to Stephen we move to 'he as the marshall ghost, in a context in which this move is not fully expected, and in a parallel to the totally unsignalled

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[57] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 16.

passage from the actuality of Stephen's surroundings to the world of his imagination: we are only given evidence of the imaginary status of the scene after it has concluded:

> O how cold and strange it was to *think* of all that![58]

Another example of the fluidity of the narrative voices is Stephen's brooding on the initial session of the retreat sermon. The narrator remains this time for the most part in the third person, but is closer to free indirect speech than to an omniscient observer: exhortations and changes of style betray this passage as another instance of Stephen's stream of consciousness, occupying an indefinite place between incommunicable personal experience and the voices of others: this interior monologue is constructed on the basis of the preacher's rhetoric, and yet it characterises Stephen's inner states, from anguish to despair:

> The faint glimmer of fear became a terror of spirit as the hoarse voice of the preacher blew death into his soul. He suffered its agony. He felt the deathchill touch the extremities and creep onwards towards the heart, the film of death veiling the eyes, the bright centres of the brain extinguished one by one like lamps, the last sweat oozing upon the skin, the powerlessness of the dying limbs [...].[59]

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[58] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 17, my emphasis.

[59] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 120.

In what follows the complexity of the style continues to grow, and its copiousness parallels Stephen's growing despair through a display of long periods, exhortations, rhetorical questions, and appeal to the authority of quotations.

Similarly, Stephen's brooding over his own sins acquires an elaborate tone punctuated with theological references:

> His days and works and thoughts could make no atonement for him, the fountains of sanctifying grace having ceased to refresh his soul. At most, by an alms given to a beggar whose blessing he fled from, he might hope wearily to win for himself some measure of actual grace.[60]

Thus, the space of the interiority of the hero is indissolubly tied to an external discourse which shapes it: the intensification of Stephen's experience is brought to us by stylistic shifts which themselves configure his inner world; Stephen's own individuality exceeds the boundaries of a self-contained subject, and arises only in relation to the shaping force of a shared language, just as the deeds of the mythic hero are a product of the consciousness of the community that produces them.

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[60] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 110-111.

Individual actions and text are constantly intertwined throughout *A Portrait of the Artist*, to the extent that actions are prefigured, interpreted and understood in terms of previously existent texts: many passages revolve around a quotation against whose meaning and connotations the narrative seems to stand as a commentary as well as a necessary consequence. The episode by the river Liffey is captured in a quotation:

> —A day of dappled sea-borne clouds.
>
> The phrase and the day and the scene harmonised in a chord.[61]

And this harmony of life and words, this fluidity between reality and its representation, belongs to a landscape where myths are possible and where the modern interpretation of reality is not: to a world where the world itself speaks beyond notions of authorship, and where words find themselves sharing a soil of meaning with non-linguistic objects.

In such a world the evil spirits that inhabit darkness can have a voice, and a voice of their own:

> He waited still at the threshold as at the entrance to some dark cave. Faces were there; eyes: they waited and watched.

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[61] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 180.

—We knew perfectly well of course that although it was bound to come to the light he would find considerable difficulty in endeavouring to try to induce himself to try to endeavour to ascertain the spiritual plenipotentiary and so we knew perfectly well—[62]

According to their evil nature, these spirits utter a meaningless speech which only frightens Stephen, but they are still able to talk, independently of any other narrative voice, in a context in which Stephen's world has the meaningful quality of a mythic land.

It is therefore not surprising that the laws of association in the narrative are often *textual*: in a world understood as a text, a text becomes a world, and its passages events that relate to one another by reminiscence. Therefore, Stephen's recalling of Emma is not only tied to the poems that he wrote and writes for her, but to the very quality of *A Portrait of the Artist* as an event, and thus after ten years in the narrative (and 169 pages in the Penguin edition) the description of the tram episode[63] is repeated in part with ritual precision.

It is around another ritual enunciation, that of the *Confiteor*, that we find a clear instance of the intersection of temporalities in *A Portrait of the Artist*.

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[62] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 147.

[63] The episode of the tram appears on pp. 72 and 241. See 5.4, where this episode is presented as an example of Modernist mythopeia.

While Stephen is waiting to take part in the school play, Heron demands a confession from him, and as Stephen recites the *Confiteor* in response, two associated incidents come to his mind and are also introduced in the story: the first one is Stephen's English master making him admit that there was a heretic remark in his essay; the second, a very similar incident to the one belonging to the main story-line, in which Heron brings Stephen to tears asking him to deny the poetic excellence of Byron. After these reminiscences have unfolded, Stephen is still reciting the *Confiteor*, closing a subversion of the main story's temporality that has not accidentally happened against the background of *ritual* words: if we follow the outlined genealogy of mythic discourse,[64] we can explain its ambiguities, including its challenge of linear temporality, as a narrative development of the sacred character of the ritual word. The connection between the ritual words and these reminiscences is openly stated in the story:

> The confession came only from Stephen's lips and while they spoke the words, a sudden memory had carried him to another scene called up, as if by magic, at the moment when he had noted the faint cruel dimples at the corners of Heron's smiling lips and had felt the familiar stroke of the cane against his calf and had heard the familiar word of admonition: —Admit.[65]

It is also the evocative power of words that is at the root of another chain of reminiscences in Stephen's conversation with the director, who invites him to

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[64] See above, chapters 3 and 4.

[65] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 82.

join the order. [66] Upon the words '*Les jupes*' Stephen's mind starts to unfold a chain of associations full of sensuous details, up to the point when

> the echoes of certain expressions used in Clongowes sounded in remote caves of his mind.[67]

Sometimes the shifts of narrative time are abrupt, and lack the connecting element of an utterance. The story that Davin tells Stephen resounds in Stephen's mind as a mythic tale that characterises his own folk:

> The last words of Davin's story sang in his memory and the figure of the woman in the story stood forth [...] as a type of her race and of his own, a batlike soul waking to the consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness [...].[68]

After this reverie, and without transition, the hand of the flower-girl brings Stephen and the reader back to the main narrative. A similar sudden shift occurs after Stephen's recalling of the performance of Yeat's *The Countess Cathleen*,[69] but it had been again the power of words that had initiated the recalling of this episode:

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[66] See Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 168-170.

[67] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 170.

[68] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 198.

[69] See Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 246.

> The verses crooned in the ear of his memory composed slowly before his remembering eyes the scene of the hall on the night of the opening of the national theatre.[70]

Contrasting with these instances of intersecting lines of time, but adding no less ambiguity to the flow of Stephen's mind, which is the flow of the novel's action, dream and actuality mix in the episode of Stephen's communion after his confession:

> In a dream he fell asleep. In a dream he rose and saw that it was morning. In a waking dream he went through the quiet morning towards the college.[71]

What follows has therefore an ambiguous status, epitomising the enchanted quality of an unstable space between subjectivity and actuality in which the whole of the novel moves.

7.3.2. Mythical Narrativity in *Four Quartets*.

There is also an underlying narrative in *Four Quartets*: here the quest is not that of the hero, but that of the poet, or the religious man; yet it remains a spiritual voyage, a series of attempts of which each of the quartets is an instance, to finally find repose in the closure that 'Little Gidding' provides. The

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[70] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 245.

[71] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 158.

search for the timeless moment is itself a progression: a progressive exploration of the nature of temporality and succession. In 'East Coker', a poem about origins and ancestors, this quest is thematised in terms of end and beginning, with a constant resort to their paradoxical identification. The poem opens with 'In my beginning is my end'[72] and closes with 'In my end is my beginning';[73] it sets off to find the moment of significance (and of personal identity) at the very origin:

> Dawn points, and another day
> Prepares for heat and silence. Out at sea the dawn wind
> Wrinkles and slides. I am here
> Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning.[74]

Nevertheless, in each of the first three quartets, the exploration does not render full satisfaction, and thus the journey backwards of 'East Coker' fails to offer an answer to the author's quest. Only at the place of rest that 'Little Gidding' provides does the futility of this search for origins get incorporated into a significant pattern:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started

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[72] Eliot, 'East Coker' I, in *Collected Poems*, p. 196.

[73] Eliot, 'East Coker' V, ibid., p. 204.

[74] Eliot, 'East Coker' I, ibid., p. 197.

And know the place for the first time.[75]

To the extent to which *Four Quartets* describe this exploration, they participate in a narrative structure, but this narrativity is also endowed with a mythic quality, since it is again a sequence with a sacrifice at its centre: the turning into a sequence of a sacrificial experience. Throughout the poems, the personal voice gets joined to the death of the sacrificial victim, to the death of Christ. The sacrificial event of Christ's passion and death constitutes a centre for the text, the timeless moment out of which the text emerges after the application of discursivity; and as a turning into discourse of a ritual, the text cannot but retain the mythic traits that point to a sacred origin, of which the sacrifice of the author is only an instance.

Likewise, the references to the Eucharist in *A Portrait of the Artist* and the description of the rites of communion had assigned to Stephen, Joyce's projection, the roles of Christ, his patron saint and Icarus, and it is in this decreasing order that they bring about their sacrificial connotations.

7.3.3. A Heroic Spiritual Journey: A Myth of Rebirth

The five chapters of *A Portrait of the Artist*, as five stages in the forging of Stephen's heroic identity, correspond to the five sections of Eliot's *Four*

[75] Eliot, 'Little Gidding' V. ibid., p. 222.

Quartets, in that they constitute a progression easily associable with a myth of rebirth which is also a myth of grace lost and regained.

Chapter I of *A Portrait of the Artist* depicts the world of childhood innocence of Stephen, as a world with which he can have a meaningful relationship; in this sense Stephen's childhood innocence is a state of grace from which he will feel progressively detached, as when later, reflecting on his own past,

> the memory of his childhood suddenly grew dim. He tried to call forth some of its vivid moments but could not. He recalled only names [...].[76]

Even though the episodes of Stephen's childhood are often moments of estrangement, prompting feelings of inadequacy, there remains in the general pattern an essential sense of belonging, testified to by the successful resolution of the punishment incident that closes the first chapter: Stephen succeeds in asserting his innocence before the rector.

Chapter II brings disillusion and disenchantment. The world grows increasingly vacuous, in parallel to the growth of Stephen's feeling of inadequacy. The episodes of the race-training and the trip to Cork display the grotesque quality of an environment that has ceased to be meaningful. It is then only consequent that Stephen seeks refuge in a breach of his surrounding

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[76] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 98.

squalor, and is driven to visit the prostitute, as the ultimate sign of fallenness. Yet soon in the narrative Stephen realises that baseness of his state, and chapter III constitutes a first attempt at redemption. Here grace is to be regained thanks to a passage through negativity: the retreat sermons, dwelling on darkness and self-denial, eventually lead to Stephen's confession and penitence; even more, Stephen's half-dreamt communion will be followed by his own voluntary exercises in ascesis.

However, in chapter IV the power of asceticism is revealed insufficient. When, after the amendment of his life, Stephen is confronted with the invitation to join the Jesuit order, his life of negative piety is already crumbling down, and before the director he finally realises that his change of attitude is leading him to positions for which he is not destined. The situation of squalor at home adds another element pointing to the need of something more than a passage through negativity to recover the lost grace. Finally, in Stephen's visions by the river Liffey, an outer figure makes itself present, and by this very occurrence Stephen's life takes a new turn along a course of meaning.

After the intercession of this extraneous figure, chapter V concentrates on learning and the discussion of aesthetic ideas: the scenes take place now at the university and the library. It is as if Stephen had found in aesthetic theory and practice the means to return to the lost meaningful world of his childhood, and it is reliance on these means, including his own verse compositions, that

grants Stephen a positive and optimistic attitude towards his future. He seems to be prepared at this point to be born again.

Yet the restoration of grace or the new birth is only announced, and does not actually take place. We could say, according to the dramatic pattern that was found in ancient Greek tragedy by Nietzsche, that the heroic quality of the main character does not complete its cycle, and thus he is not denied before the eyes of the gods, as the necessary move for the continuation of the ancient world order. In contrast to this, the mythic structure of *Four Quartets* goes beyond the end of the tragic scheme, and concludes with the presentation of a world fully restored to its primordial grace. Let us see the stages that lead to this restoration.

In section I of each of the quartets the initial state of grace is shown as the presence of eternity *within* time: the privileging of present time in 'Burnt Norton'; the cyclical temporality of 'East Coker'; the a-temporal time of the tolling bell in 'The Dry Salvages'; and the 'never and always' of midwinter spring's 'suspended time' in 'Little Gidding'. But worldly experience soon leads to dissatisfaction: the timeless moment appears elusive and yearned for rather than attained in 'Burnt Norton' II; the past renders no wisdom in 'East Coker' II; accumulation of experience is meaningless in 'The Dry Salvages' II; all worldly landscapes are deadly in 'Little Gidding' II.

Section III offers an attempt to regain the original moment through self-denial: descending lower into the dark; exploring the paths of negation; voyaging forward into indifference towards a 'love beyond desire'. Again this ascetic moment is not sufficient, and section IV introduces the need for intercession: through a longing for enchanted nature in 'Burnt Norton'; a not fully accomplished sacrifice in 'East Coker'; and a prayer to the Virgin Mary in 'The Dry Salvages'. Somewhat differently, section IV of 'Little Gidding' already constitutes a closure, since the sacrificial rite of communication is here successfully performed, in the roundness of the two stanzas, against the background of a war fire that is also a purgatorial fire, a Pentecostal fire and a sacrificial fire.

Accordingly, there is also a contrast between the final sections of each of the first three quartets and that of 'Little Gidding': whereas in the former an analogy is drawn between spiritual health and artistic wholeness and accuracy (as Joyce did in the final chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist*), 'Little Gidding' actually enacts this analogy, and presents a new birth, or an attained state of grace, through the poetic closure that it performs. It is in this sense that *Four Quartets* goes beyond the suggested tragic pattern, creating in artistic terms the mythic world-order that follows a successful sacrifice.

Conclusion

The pervasiveness of Nietzsche's aesthetic ideas has been shown to go beyond the explicit textual or ideological influences on literary Modernism which are often argued for. In particular, the points at which the sacred and the aesthetic are thought together within *The Birth of Tragedy*, corroborated by Nietzsche's earlier notes (Christianity as a Dionysiac religion) and by his later works (his first bood as a *sacrifice* in *Beyond Good and Evil*), have found a parallel in the aesthetic practice of James Joyce and T. S. Eliot.

Having taken *The Birth of Tragedy* as a theory of the relationship between the sacred and the aesthetic, we have been able to envisage the broad lines of a general theory of representation which, out of rhetorical notions, has established the origin of representation in the opposition between the metonymyc and the metaphoric drives, ascribing, in a Nietzschean fashion, a foundational character to contiguity (as the lack of differences or similarities, as the Dionysiac boundlessness). Thus a genealogy of philosophical representation (*Vorstellung*) appears, if we see it in the context of an aesthetic theory,[1] as grounded in the ultimate sacred act: the ritual of sacrifice, from which an already internal process of secularisation produces the discoursive rendering of myth, still retaining the respectability of sacred speech, of *hieroi logoi*. It would be only when mythic representation disavows itself from its *ritual* source (arguably when the ritual killings of Socrates and Christ enter the history of

theory) that modern secularisation proper begins, and the possibility of doing philosophy *according to myth* (Nietzsche's nostalgic yearning for the pre-Socratic world) disappears.

I have shown that this is not entirely the case, and that the very logic of sacrifice, even in its 'modern' form, necessarily entails a compromise with the sacred and can not just survive amidst the prevalence of secular representation only (just as representation itself is also inherent to its logic). I have tried to prove this by discrediting the discourses that presuppose an *original* mimesis and by dwelling on the ambiguous position of the so-called first metaphysical thinker (Plato) and that of the first of the last anti-metaphysical ones (Nietzsche): surprisingly, both of them are philosophers and myth-makers.

Moreover, the aesthetic practice of James Joyce and T. S. Eliot has revealed that the points of intersection of the sacred and the aesthetic are recovered precisely in response to a modern tradition of secularisation that devoids art of all sacred value, and the external world of all enchantment; using mainly the living force of the mythic aspect of Christianity, one of the main shaping discourses of our Western tradition, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Four Quartets* re-enact the uttering of sacred speech within literature, and by doing so, they in their turn throw light on the genealogy of our modern philosophical notions (individuation, identity, selfhood, reflection), showing their ineluctable link to an ever-elusive origin in the representational character *already* implicit in ritual sacredness.

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[1] I have tried to suggest, however, that there is no theory which is not aesthetic: it would be a

contradiction in terms.

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